in demand. “We’re already on shaky ground,” Ingoglia said. Before this next need emerges, it’s important that providers be at the ready and are able to provide services, he said.

The good news, he noted, is that there is a lot of awareness around mental health and addiction and the impact of COVID-19. The survey helped put in perspective the crisis confronting behavioral health organizations, he said.

“We’re incredibly proud of behavioral health organizations all over the country” that are moving forward with telehealth support in such a short time frame and delivering food and medication to established clients, said Ingoglia. “There’s been no focus on the incredible work they’re doing to continue to be an important support for their clients and community,” he said.

New Jersey weighs in

The CEO of the Mental Health Association of Essex and Morris Inc. said he is pleased that New Jersey has been proactive and flexible and has provided regulatory relief. “It’s been a tremendous help,” Robert Davison told MHW. “We’re very grateful.”

The association’s main office in North Jersey is roughly 15 miles west of Manhattan, with additional offices also close by in East Orange, West Orange, Passaic and Parsippany. “We are in the epicenter,” said Davison. “It’s been unprecedented and has had a dramatic impact on our agency and our ability to deliver services.”

“Many parts of the country are not impacted as much as New Jersey,” added Davison. “We’re providing services to the extent that we can.” The association has applied for the Paycheck Protection Program but hasn’t heard back yet, he said.

“We transitioned very quickly to telehealth,” said Davison. “Fortunately, we had the technology infrastructure needed to do that.” The Mental Health Association of Essex and Morris was also one of the 800 responding organizations to the National Council’s survey.

The association’s clients are still very vulnerable, he noted. Social workers continue to make food and medication deliveries. Additionally, patients are being given injections and having their blood levels taken. “The providers are doing face-to-face consultations while following CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] guidelines,” he said, adding that services are also being provided to the homeless community.

“Our direct care staff has been very heroic in carrying out their duties,” Davison said. Many staff are conducting telehealth and care management services and psychiatric counseling.

However, providers are still losing about $50,000 a week, he said, even after considerable regulation relief.

Flattening the curve

“I’m concerned about the curve behind the curve,” said Davison, explaining that by saying that any economic downturn, much less a pandemic, results in increases in domestic violence and mental illness and substance abuse issues. “What are we going to do to flatten that curve?” he noted.

Davison added, “There needs to be a process in place right now to ensure behavioral health services in this country are sustainable now and in the future.”

As the government works on its fourth economic stimulus package, “it’s important that the behavioral health community is remembered in that package in order to sustain current activities and prepare for the future,” said Davison. •

Psychological distress found among exposed health care workers

Recent research to assess the magnitude of mental health outcomes and associated factors among health care workers treating patients exposed to COVID-19 in China has found that many are psychologically stressed, raising concerns about the psychological well-being of physicians and nurses involved in the acute COVID-19 outbreak.

The study, “Factors Associated With Mental Health Outcomes Among Health Care Workers Exposed to Coronavirus Disease 2019,” continues on next page.

Bottom Line...

This study, which assesses the mental health burden of Chinese health care workers, serves as important evidence to direct the promotion of mental well-being among health care workers, say researchers.
Continued from previous page

was published in March in *JAMA Network Open*.

The researchers note that since the end of December 2019, the Chinese city of Wuhan has reported a novel pneumonia caused by COVID-19, which is spreading domestically and internationally. The virus has been named severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).

The study was conducted by Zhongchun Liu, M.D., of the Department of Psychiatry at Renmin Hospital of Wuhan University; and Shaohua Hu, M.D., of the Department of Psychiatry in the First Affiliated Hospital at the Zhejiang University School of Medicine in Hangzhou, China.

Health care workers on the front line who are directly involved in the diagnosis, treatment and care of patients with COVID-19 are at risk of developing psychological distress and other mental health symptoms, the researchers found. The ever-increasing number of confirmed and suspected cases, overwhelming workload, depletion of personal protective equipment, widespread media coverage, lack of specific drugs and feelings of being inadequately supported may all contribute to the mental burden of these health care workers, the study stated.

Psychological assistance services, including telephone-, internet- and application-based counseling or intervention, have been widely deployed by local and national mental health institutions in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. On Feb. 2, 2020, the State Council announced it was setting up nationwide psychological assistance hotlines to help during the epidemic situation. However, evidence-based evaluations and mental health interventions targeting front-line health care workers are relatively scarce, the researchers said.

**Method**

The cross-sectional study included 1,257 health care workers in 34 hospitals equipped with fever clinics or wards for patients with COVID-19 in multiple regions of China. Of all participants, 60.8% were nurses, and 39.2% were physicians; 60.5% worked in hospitals in Wuhan and 41.5% were front-line health care workers. The workers were engaged in diagnosing, treating or providing nursing care to patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

**Results**

Nurses, women, front-line health care workers and those working in Wuhan, China, reported more severe degrees of all measurements of mental health symptoms than other health care workers. They reported experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, insomnia and distress.

Overall, 50.4%, 44.6%, 34% and 71.5% of all participants reported symptoms of depression, anxiety, insomnia and distress, respectively.

The researchers noted that the psychological response of health care workers to an epidemic of infectious diseases is complicated. In a previous study during the acute SARS outbreak, 89% of health care workers who were in high-risk situations reported psychological symptoms.

Sources of distress may include feelings of vulnerability or loss of control and concerns about health of self, spread of virus, health of family and others, changes in work and being isolated. The fact that COVID-19 is human-to-human transmissible, associated with high morbidity and potentially fatal may intensify the perception of personal danger, according to the researchers.

Additionally, predictable shortages of supplies and an increasing influx of suspected and actual cases of COVID-19 contribute to the pressures and concerns of health care workers, the researchers indicated.

The study aimed to provide an assessment of the mental health burden of Chinese health care workers, which can serve as important evidence to direct the promotion of mental well-being among health care workers.

Protecting health care workers is an important component of public health measures for addressing the COVID-19 epidemic. Special interventions to promote mental well-being in health care workers exposed to COVID-19 need to be implemented, with women, nurses and front-line workers requiring particular attention, the researchers stated.

**REFORM from page 1**

The *Oregonian* newspaper reported this month that the county’s four mental health court monitors have resigned after an investigation into misconduct led to three of the employees receiving letters of proposed dismissal. The mental health court is one of four diversion courts in the county that includes the city of Portland. There are also two drug court programs and a DUI court in the county.

Three of the four mental health court workers served as case managers responsible for assisting clients with serious mental illness in following through on court recommendations and linking to necessary services. However, an investigation confirmed that the case managers were not fulfilling several of their duties, including in some cases by not meeting with clients in person.

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