

COVID-19: Uncharted waters

Stephen A Margolis

It's okay to be fearful, but don't let the fear keep you from flying!

– TD Jakes¹

Dear Colleagues,

'Uncharted waters' is perhaps an understatement of where we are headed at this time. The situation is fluid, with government regulations for our society changing rapidly. Our challenge is that the evidence basis for clinical management of our patients is still evolving.

There is clear evidence for the principles underlying how we manage our patients. As SARS-CoV-2 is transferred by aerosol, face masks on infected people decrease spread. With SARS-CoV-2 surviving on surfaces for up to 72 hours, careful hand washing and avoiding touching your face is essential. Physical separation of at least 1.5 m between people reduces the risk of spread. Self-isolation of those most at risk decreases the risk of infection.

General practitioners (GPs) in Australia and globally are under pressure. Apart from managing our patients' regular clinical and mental health needs day in and day out, we are now confronted with the additional responsibility of being on the frontline of the medical response to the pandemic. Our patients are understandably stressed and worried about what will happen, especially as the future path Australia will follow is at present unclear.

Fortunately, together with the public, we have access to the world's best-practice information to help guide us along this path (Box 1). When accurate information is combined with the skills GPs bring to patient care and the enormous reservoir of reciprocal goodwill GPs have with their patients, a calmer, better-informed

community forms. That benefit then permeates across all aspects of society.

As GPs we are certainly on the frontline in supporting our local communities, a role that GPs cherish and wholeheartedly support. But that also places additional stress on us. Please be assured that you are not alone in this regard. Consider your own collegiate network. Perhaps reach out to less experienced colleagues to offer them support? And of course, in these difficult times, do not delay seeking personal help if you need it (Box 2).

Across Australia, GPs have always distinguished themselves when providing support to individuals in their local communities in times of crisis. Think back to the recent bushfires and the many cyclones, floods and droughts before. COVID-19 is a more pervasive and deadlier challenge, but through boundless skill and goodwill, GPs will support their communities once again.

To help support our colleagues working in general practice, the *Australian Journal of General Practice (AJGP)* has developed a dedicated coronavirus (COVID-19) webpage. Important, relevant and timely

articles will be published as they become available, in addition to the scheduled monthly release of *AJGP*.

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Reference

1. Jakes TD. *Instinct: The power to unleash your inborn drive*. Nashville, TN: FaithWords, 2014.

Box 1. Evidence-based resources

- Australian Government Department of Health, www.health.gov.au
 - The contact details for state and territory health departments are summarised at www.health.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/local-state-and-territory-health-departments
 - The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners – Coronavirus (COVID-19) information for GPs, www.racgp.org.au/coronavirus
 - Worldometer – COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, www.worldometers.info/coronavirus
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Box 2. Personal support for general practitioners

- Doctors' Health Advisory Service, www.dhas.org.au
 - Australasian Doctors' Health Network, www.adhn.org.au
 - The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners' GP wellbeing support program, www.racgp.org.au/running-a-practice/practice-management/gp-wellbeing
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