

INTROSPECTIVE WELLNESS: MENTAL HEALTH IN A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY



Your Mental Health Matters

Use this time, especially while we're learning online, to see what works best for you. Mental health plays a role in students' success, because it alters our lives in several facets. Strong evidence has suggested for years that mental health needs are intertwined with academic success. Academic achievement, physical health, and overall satisfaction with your life experiences may be affected. Even more today, we have had to adapt to new learning environments, technology barriers, and social deficits. Setting yourself up with a healthy mindset and remembering this is something that is constantly changing, will make school not only easier, but enjoyable. Self care and focusing on one's mental health is not easy. As a society, we are still not good at it, despite many of the effects being preventable. We are living through a time when self care is gaining momentum and being pushed to the forefront of healthcare for patients.

School-Specific Tips

Print out or use your computer/phone's calendar

- Add all synchronous sessions, office hours, etc. in one color per class, to note required class time and connect with professors
- Mark all major exams and assignments, including a reminder at least 2 days before the event
- Set aside time for lecture review for asynchronous sessions

Online Etiquette

Stay Responsible! Always double check that you have successfully completed and submitted your work. Reach out to instructors early if you have questions or concerns; let them know your situation and be willing to work with them.



(Remember: You are responsible for your success in these courses, so set yourself up for success no matter what that looks like in your environment!)

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A Professional's Perspective

We sat down with Dr. Anne Jennings, MD, and Gaby Schilling, LPC, ATR-BC, RYT to delve deeper into integrative care from a professional's perspective. Dr. Jennings did her residency at HUP and is a primary care physician at Braddock Family Medicine. Ms. Schilling is a behavioral health consultant at Braddock Family Medicine, board-certified art therapist and registered yoga teacher.

1. What is Integrated Medicine to you?

Integrated Medicine is a patient-centered approach to healthcare with a focus on treating the “whole-person.” At our primary care practice, the PCP and Behavioral Health Consultant work together using shared care plans to help patients achieve wellness goals and improve daily functioning. We’re all about the mind-body connection!

2. How do you assess the whole patient when every patient has a different background?

Screening for SDOH (social determinants of health) is instrumental in treating the “whole patient” in order to identify barriers to care that may be impacting their health. We have to consider patients’ basic needs in order to provide effective care. Our relationships with community organizations have been incredibly helpful in connecting patients to these needed resources. For example, we currently have a partnership with the local food bank in response to COVID-19 to distribute emergency food boxes at our office for patients who screen positive for food insecurity.

3. What does the behavioral screening process look like and what is its importance?

At our office, we screen patients at every visit for depression and SDOH, including drug and alcohol use and food insecurity. Patients who screen positive for these issues can be connected to the on-site Behavioral Health Consultant via a “warm-handoff,” often right after their PCP visit. This is important as patients referred to specialty mental health or substance use services often have to wait several weeks or months to start treatment. The Behavioral Health Consultant can provide immediate support while patients are waiting to be connected to specialty care. Behavioral Health support may also be requested for patients who need assistance managing chronic conditions, such as diabetes, and making healthy lifestyle changes. Routine screening can identify useful information that may otherwise not be disclosed by the patient, meaning sooner intervention and connection to community supports.

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4. How did COVID-19 affect or change the way work is done in the office?

With COVID-19, there has been a noticeable increase in patients experiencing heightened stress, anxiety, and depression. For safety reasons, most provider visits and behavioral health consults were being conducted via telemedicine. Within our health organization as a whole, the Behavioral Health Team also created a Referral Pool, where providers who do not have a Behavioral Health Consultant at their office can refer patients for one-time outreach. This has been an essential service with the increase in patients seeking support during COVID-19. And hopefully it will demonstrate the need for behavioral health support at additional primary care offices!

5. Any general advice to students on how to get in front of your mental health or self-care routines?

Make self-care a priority and think of it as preventative care. You do not need to wait until the point of exhaustion and burn-out to take a break. Regularly taking the time to pause and do something to relax or recharge can actually help you be more efficient with studying, working, and all of the other things on your to-do lists in the long-run! Simple things can make a big difference – don’t overlook the benefits of sleep, eating well, and hydration even as a busy student (or doctor!). Although many moments in school and training feel like they are the most important thing, it’s important to keep some perspective and make time for yourself. Taking a study break to watch silly tv or spend time with friends is not a waste, it’s a good way to remember you are a human first and student second. Setting up routines that work for you now, be it exercise, or scheduled time to talk with friends and family, will serve you in the busy years to come.



Not a 'One-Size-Fits-All'

Hear from advisors and students in our program about how they found their 'new normal.'



Danielle Lever, Senior Advisor

Quarantine has definitely been interesting. For me, I was only back at work for maybe 2 months since returning from maternity leave before everything got shut down. I would not be able to do my job as well as I do without the full support of the Pre-Health team, LPS and wonderful students. Feeling supported at work and in your personal life makes all of the difference not only during a pandemic but daily life. We have two boys, ages 6 and 8 months. Our son, Will, was in kindergarten and we had to transition him to online learning and being socially isolated from his friends and extended family. I was more concerned about him than working from home full-time. It was difficult at times managing his school work, the baby and both my husband and I working from home full-time. And it was easy to stay connected to work 24/7 but that's not a good idea. Being almost July, I have found the following things to be most helpful in managing my stress and anxiety:

Working out first thing in the morning. This has been a lifesaver and probably the most consistent I have been with keeping a workout routine but that 30 minutes in the morning, 5 days/week, has really helped my energy levels, a time to check out from everything and just focus on me. My husband and I alternate watching the kids and by 8am we have both got our workouts in for the day.

Keeping open communication with Jackie and Faye; we have bi-weekly meetings on Mondays & Wednesdays, and this really helps us stay on track with deadlines, any student issues we need to be aware of and it's just nice to 'see' them and chat.

Being organized and efficient in my workload. I'm pretty organized to begin with, but being home with a baby throws a wrench in even the most organized of schedules. So knowing what I have to do each week outside of scheduled appointments and knowing I have to care for a baby gives me grace and patience with myself.

Checking in with family and friends weekly. Now that things are in the green phase, we have started to see our parents and siblings and that has helped us all. There is no substitute to being with loved ones. Thank goodness for video chats!

I think the biggest advice I have told students, current, inactive, and new, who have contacted me is to just be okay with the unknown and knowing you can only control so much in your life. So knowing that you're doing the best you can in whatever you're doing, is all you can do. And knowing when to ask for help or to say 'hey I need a minute' is 100% okay (quarantine or not)!

Jackie McLaughlin, Program Director

Rediscovering The Loop: A former runner, I often wish I was out there again covering ground the way I used to do. With my gym being closed, and disappointing news that my new bike recently ordered from REI was out of stock, I laced up a new pair of shoes and took to "The Loop". Getting out there early by 6:30 or 7:00 am on a Saturday or Sunday is key to avoiding the crowd. Most weekend mornings you can find me there walking the 8.4 mile loop between my East Falls neighborhood and the PMA. It totals about a 10 mile walk for me when all is said and done and I must confess my weekend afternoons usually accommodate a long and restful nap.

With social distancing as the norm and working from home, even a committed introvert like me is missing spending time with others. I definitely have days when I experience Zoom fatigue especially at the end of a busy work week when I do want to socialize with happy hours but I have an even greater need to unplug from technology. One solution I have found particularly satisfying is getting together at the end of a long work week with a friend to "Moth". *All These Wonders* and *Occasional Magic* are collections of true stories from 'The Moth.' We take turns reading aloud to each other one story a piece, sometimes including a glass of wine. We maintain social distancing, but this simple face to face interaction with another human has become a relaxing ritual I hope will remain with me into the future.



To check out local running paths or delve into a world of fascinating stories featured on 'The Moth,' browse the following links:

- <https://rootsrated.com/stories/5-great-long-runs-philadelphia>
- <https://themoth.org/>

Not a 'One-Size-Fits-All'



Morgan Hawes, Current Student

Since March, I have moved apartments, grappled with the trying political issues, spent a lot more time alone, adjusted to online classes, and started to fill out medical school applications. During this time, I have experienced unrelenting stress from both over stimulation (e.g. finals preparation) and under stimulation (e.g. social distancing). Since then, I have become more proactive about my mental health. Mental health issues are unique in that weeks and months in mental health care are really closer to minutes or seconds in terms of progress. A bad day or a stressful event are normal, but often self-taught coping strategies are not enough when faced with daunting and persistent stressors. Given these trying times, it is imperative to start mental health care early before a problem develops. Unfortunately, many do not reach out for help until serious symptoms develop. While each person's journey in seeking help is unique, often the biggest challenge in getting help is overcoming stigma. Health care providers are at an increased risk of suicide due to the high level of competition, the emotional challenges in providing care, and the feeling that we must remain strong or face discrimination. It is imperative that we understand the risks inherent in pursuing these rewarding, yet challenging, health care professions, and recognize that reaching out for mental health help is the same as reaching out for help with any other health care issue. It is not a sign of weakness nor a reflection of our moral character. The journey can be confusing and stressful, from insurance companies to sliding scales, to confronting our own demons. The most important thing that you can do is start talking. The counseling and psychological services (CAPS) at Penn are a good place to start, but it is important to remember that there are no quick fixes in mental healthcare. We need great transparency about mental health issues, so that we, as a community, can help those who need it, because sooner or later we will all need someone to talk to.

Sean Spangler, Current Student

Between March and now, I went from living with a roommate in Center City, working full time, and taking classes to moving back with my parents in rural PA, transitioning to online work and then being laid off due to a loss of grant funding, and taking classes completely online. I also went from being surrounded by friends in my postbac classes to socializing completely virtually. I've felt a wide variety of feelings, like confusion, frustration, anxiety, sadness, and even relief and contentment. The most apparent feelings are frustration and anxiety with the loss of certainty brought on by this pandemic and the federal government's response to the pandemic and racial injustice. However, staying at home has been a positive change for me since my pre-pandemic stress level was pretty unhealthy. It has been nice to slow down, spend time with my family, and not have to constantly rush from one place to the next. The biggest change I've made to my self-care routine is letting myself take breaks and accepting that I don't need to be constantly productive. I've found it particularly helpful to stop studying when I feel my brain getting tired and go for a walk or read (for fun!!). I have also found it helpful to check in with friends often, be honest about how we are feeling, and reassure each other that this situation is temporary. I also think it's important to note that I see a therapist and he has remained a big source of support during the past few months. (Friends are so important but it's also important to talk with someone who is formally trained to help maintain mental health!) I think it's really important to be compassionate with yourself in this program and not compare yourself to others. Comparison is unfortunately inherent in the med school application process but it's crucial to remind yourself that you are enough as you are and your worth is not determined by your GPA. Keep focusing on why you're doing this and the fact that if you're passionate enough about medicine to do a postbac then you are so needed as a doctor (or dentist or vet or PA). Your classmates are teammates, not competitors, and reach out to them and the advisors if you need anything. These courses are tough but it's okay to ask for help, find meaning in what you're learning, and acknowledge that you've already come a long way by enrolling in a postbac.



Not a 'One-Size-Fits-All'



Alex Burdzy, Current Student

I was really fortunate in that there wasn't much adjustment. I have my own apartment right off campus, and I work at HUP in clinical research. I started WFH at the same time learning went remote. Sleeping/eating/working/studying in the same place was tough, but I made myself take daily quarantine walks around the neighborhood. It was a great break and helped me appreciate just how beautiful spring is where I live. Honestly, my first feeling was relief. Working full time and taking 2 classes as well as 2 labs on a strict schedule was grueling. WFH and remote learning allowed me more flexibility. I did get lonely though pretty quickly. FaceTime with friends and family as well as zoom game nights made a big difference! Since social distancing has been in place, I've really focused more time on being in nature. Hiking, biking, and walking with and without friends have become a daily routine. They're new routines that I'll hopefully keep up when this (eventually) passes. I've also spent more time trying to be accepting of all of my emotions and realizing that what I'm feeling is okay. Times are tough. It's okay to have a periodic meltdown or be bummed for a bit. It's what you do with that energy that matters. Taking care of me ripples out to all aspects of my life. In the wise words of RuPaul, "If you can't love yourself, how the hell you gonna love somebody else?" Stay flexible as well as adapt your lifestyle and study habits. Always ask for help from your professors, TAs, advisors, and fellow students when needed. Most importantly, remember that helping others helps yourself. If you want to feel better, think about volunteering, assisting another classmate with a difficult topic, or just check in with others. As future healthcare workers, our role will be to help others. We're living in times that give us ample opportunities to do just that.

Erin Korth, Current Student

I was living in Penn grad housing and my New York apartment is sublet so I had three days to pack up and move everything to my parents' house, which is where I've been since March. I'm so lucky my parents were able to help me out, but man it's an adjustment going back to sleeping in your childhood bedroom. On top of the pandemic I had recurring nightmares about high school. What surprised me was feeling so listless when it became clear that we would need to quarantine for more than a few weeks. After so long inside, cut off from friends it was hard to force my brain to focus or to care about the outcome of schoolwork, because even though I knew we would go back to normal eventually, subconsciously I was having trouble envisioning things "mattering" again. For some reason being careful about my skincare routine helped me feel grounded. I was trying not to leave the house so I wasn't bothering with my makeup or hair for a long time, but forcing myself to go through my skincare routine made things feel a little more normal and reminded me that I'll probably be able to leave the house again so I should keep moisturizing. My number one tip for Penn is: FIND A BUDDY. Penn is full of smart people at all different levels of their postbac career, and it can be so easy to feel like you're the only person struggling with something. You're not. We take on so much in this program - if there's even just one person you can text when you have a sub-par exam or you're overwhelmed with volunteering or you dislike your lab TA's, it makes all the difference.



Some Peer Suggestions for Creating YOUR Routine:

- morning walks or workouts outside to start your day off right
- drink a glass of water first thing when you wake up and an hour before bed
- learn how to cook a new, healthy recipe; incorporate healthy foods into your day
- create a skincare routine you can stick to
- take a bath or long shower to relax
- it may be time for a social media break or limiting screen time
- to-do lists, write it all down to feel satisfaction as you check things off
- watch something that makes you laugh before bed (stick to comedy)
- write letters to friends or send a small gift for no reason
- catch a free live show or take a virtual museum tour
- read a book before bed or as a study break for FUN (this doesn't include Organic Chemistry)
- journal before bed, dump those thoughts
- phone a friend or family member as a study break (remember, people are working from home and may have more time than usual!)



Start Your Day Off Right Using the SAVERS Technique!

HOW TO WIN THE DAY
IF YOU WIN THE MORNING, YOU WIN THE DAY. HERE'S HOW TO START THE DAY OFF RIGHT.

From the Ask Altucher interview with Hal Elrod

S	A	V	E	R	S
Silence	Affirmations	Visualization	Exercise	Reading	Scribing
Meditation. Prayer. Breathing. Whatever it is for you, the idea is to quiet your mind, block out the chatter, and start the day with calm thoughts.	Encouraging words you tell yourself to achieve your goals, overcome fears, be healthy and happy, and live out your purpose.	Imagine yourself doing each thing, step by step, that you need to do to accomplish your goals. Then imagine what it will feel like when you succeed.	It doesn't have to be powerlifting or long distance running. Just do some bodyweight exercises for 5 minutes to get the blood and oxygen flowing to the brain.	Fill your brain with positive thoughts and ideas to improve yourself. Learn the knowledge of people who have accomplished the things you want to do.	Writing or journaling is a great way to process your thoughts and reflect on your life. It will help you be more self-aware and more articulate.

A SPOONFUL: Healthy Recipe Favorites



Pineapple Salsa Grilled Chicken -

<https://www.delish.com/cooking/recipe-ideas/recipes/a49355/grilled-honey-lime-chicken-with-pineapple-salsa-recipe/>



Watermelon Cucumber Feta Salad -

<https://www.delish.com/cooking/recipe-ideas/recipes/a5739/watermelon-salad-feta-mint-recipe/>



Chicken Tikka Masala -

<https://cafedelites.com/chicken-tikka-masala/>

Get Moving & Get Outdoors with these Linked Local Opportunities and Ideas!

POPSUGAR Fitness

free videos, lots of fun, dance cardio workouts you can do from the comfort of your home!

Orange Theory

free videos - body weight exercises and will show good alternatives for using weights like water bottles, books, suitcases, etc

Nike Run Club

free app, great for tracking your runs and has running programs/guided runs

Philly Outdoor Trails

Wissahickon Park

Running and Biking Trails



Tips For Coping with COVID-19

Share your feelings

It is okay to feel a mix of many different emotions. Sharing your feelings with a trusted family member, friend, therapist, or religious leader can help you feel less alone and more empowered to cope.

Take breaks from the news and social media

Our lives are inundated with information that can feel overwhelming at times. Remember that you are in control and can set boundaries around your media consumption, including who and what you follow, how you receive notifications, and when it is time to unplug.

Connect with others

Although you are likely social distancing from others, remember that we are relational beings and we need human connection. Be creative about connecting and checking in with others. Call. Video chat. Text. Email. Send cards or care packages. A simple act can let someone know you care.

Maintain a self-care routine

During times of uncertainty, finding ways to maintain a routine can help our minds and bodies cope. Eat three meals a day. Maintain a regular sleep schedule. Connect with nature while social distancing. Make a gratitude list. Enjoy the simple things.

Sources of Support

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

- Call 215-898-7021 and press 2 to speak to the front desk or press 1 to talk to a clinician 24/7
- Drop in to Student Health (3535 Market St.) to meet with a counselor (M-F 9:30 AM-1:30 PM)
- For virtual groups and workshops, see our [Group Listing page](#)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- Call 1-800-273-8255 (24/7) or online chat from 2 PM-2 AM:
<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Crisis Text Line

- Text HOME to 741741 (24/7): <https://www.crisistextline.org>

Trevor Project

- Call 1-866-488-7386 (24/7), online chat, or text START to 678678:
<https://www.thetrevorproject.org>

National Domestic Violence Hotline

- Call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) (24/7), or [go to their website](#).



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