



Photo: Sarah Murphy, South Sudan, 2018

URSHULA EDWARDS

SUPPLY MANAGER

Exercise! Endorphins are a great way to combat any negative feelings isolation may bring. I recommend Down Dog - it's the best for self or group practice. You choose your level, speed, area of the body you want to work and the type of yoga you want.

Learning! Generally throwing myself in work helps me not feel isolated. Although many (myself included) are unable to work, we can still put our minds to work. There are lots of free classes online at coursera and edx.

HABTAMU MEHARI

LOGISTICIAN AND COACH

In times like this, it IS very easy to consume more alcohol than usual without realizing it. Just be conscious about it and try not to get into the trap. Some people also tend to watch too many movies. Instead, **use the time you have to talk to your colleagues** and do group games and activities. Again with social distancing in mind.

TIPS FROM FIELD WORKERS



YORUBA MITCHELL

IECHP MANAGER

There are a lot more creature comforts here, so coping with isolation is not as difficult as it has been on mission sometimes. But here are a few things I've been doing:

- **Creative activities.** I'm terrible at it but painting and drawing help keep my mind focused and flowing. It also helps with feelings that are hard to articulate.
- **Keep a schedule.** It can be tempting to sleep in and lay around in your PJs, but the routine of getting up and dressed and making your bed helps keep a semblance of normalcy.
- Indoor gardening! I just potted some plants.
- Guided meditations
- Reading, especially **re-reading childhood favorites** for a pick me up!
- Try new recipes.
- **Cry when you feel like it** until you're done, it's normal.

ADITI JANI

LAB MANAGER

Mental exercise: sudoku, puzzles, meditation, journal writing, reading books. (journaling really helps if your frustrated you can write it all down and release your emotions onto paper without restriction of words you want to use).

Clean your home/room, get rid of junk you don't need (you feel so good throwing away junk), redesign your living space



Photo: Alex Huguet, Swaziland, 2016

RASHA KHOURY

OB/GYN

It helps me to not think of this as a time to "get through" but as part of my life that I am choosing to be **100% present** in: I chose to live in this city, I chose to be a health-worker in a safety net hospital, etc. **Not thinking of myself as "stuck" in my hospital or my apartment** but breaking up each of those spaces into smaller spaces that I move through (bedroom, kitchen, labor room, operating room, etc) and narrating for myself "now I am in the kitchen to make breakfast". **Breaking up the day and night into segments with some tiny ritual or routine** (meals or dedicated work hours or exercise or time to connect to family friends) and not letting those times bleed into each other.

SALLY PARKER

MIDWIFE

The way I cope in these lockdown situations are to do some sort of **physical exercise** every day. If I can I either bike ride or walk outside or if that's not allowed I exercise inside.

I love to read and so make sure I have good books. I also like movies and download those on my iPad. I love food and wine so **cook new dishes** and experiment in the kitchen.

DR. WIL VAN CLEVE

ANESTHESIOLOGIST

When you're hurting, it's not wrong to tell someone. It was very hard for me to ask for help, but when I was brave enough to text home and tell someone that I was scared, I felt better for having been honest. Also, when you're happy (and there will be moments of joy), call someone then, too.

If you haven't meditated before, it's amazing how quickly you can realize the benefits of a broader awareness of your mind and how it works. I do this now, and didn't then, and I wish I'd had this practice to help me in Jahun. Remember that your mind and your body aren't two things: you are one creature. What you eat doesn't just fuel your body, it fuels your mind, and when your choices hurt your body, your mind suffers, too. When we're scared and lack sleep, we trigger an evolutionary program that values carbohydrate: this is why we "stress eat." Allow yourself a treat each day, but take a moment before you eat to ask yourself : how will I feel 30 minutes after I eat this? If the answer is "bad", look for something else.



Photo: Siegfried Modola, South Sudan, 2017

JANE COYNE

HEAD OF MISSION

I think the essential part is to **stick to what you know about yourself**. How much XXX do you need at a minimum to keep it together - fill in the blank with exercise, alone time, water, intellectual stimulation, mindless drivel, etc.

And then **cut other people slack by thinking about the fact that their mix is not the same**.

KIM CREMERS

PHARMACY COORDINATOR

Stay in contact with friends and family – emails work but facetime/skype are optimal. Consider making a list of people you haven't spoken to recently and work through it. They would like to hear from you (and are also isolated) as much as you would like to talk to them

Do good – Is there a way to help an NGO from your room or afar? Compile a list of helpful resources, email donors with information, compile a newsletter, etc. **Maybe a local NGO could use your help** (I volunteered at an orphanage in Swaziland – games and reading)



VANESSA HARDY

PHARMACY COORDINATOR

#socialdistancing is really physical distancing so stay connected (call, video call/chat, text, play games with friends and family (i.e words with friends, scrabble or whichever ones you like or just make up some).

Explore, research and plan things you've been wanting to do - map out travel plans (for when the time comes) learn to sew, learn a new language, learn an instrument

EDNA BARTHOLOME

FINANCIAL COORDINATOR

Daily but limited media on the pandemic.

In the beginning, I was getting really stressed at watching all the news on TV and following all tweets, online alerts, etc. I now only watch Governor Cuomo's daily briefing which is very organized, fact-based and therefore calming. Around dinner time, I check for real breaking news only for 15 to 30 minutes to get updates. It's helping me a lot to manage the stress by disciplining myself on exposure to the issue. One of the things that we enjoyed as a group in Gaza on weekends was **playing "Cards against Humanity"**. It was hilarious and so politically incorrect that it was great contrast to the compassion we need to have for our work. I just learned that the game is now available to play online. <http://playingcards.io/>

KIM COMER

LOGISTICS COORDINATOR

One day a week is different. I sleep late, I put on a skirt, I read a book.

I keep a routine and always eat at the same time. No snacking. This keeps days framed. Smokers have a good idea, **every 2 hours they stand up and get outside for 5-10 minutes of me time.** I don't smoke but those breaks are a great idea.

MELANIE CONNER LYONS

PROJECT COORDINATOR

Gardening. We just built a small raised bed (3x5') for lettuce, cut away large section of grass for a veggie garden. This gives me a project, but also helps me feel like I am taking control of my well being by ensuing that we will have access to healthy food while reducing trips to the grocery store.

Manage expectations. Our approach is generally that the shelter in home order is that it will take as long as it takes to return to normal, and we have to adjust our spring and summer plans accordingly - having a garden and access exercise and fresh air through walking and biking will become increasingly important, but also looking for creative ways to manage for the long haul.



MADELEINE SMITH

ADMINISTRATOR

The most challenging part of being in a relationship in a confined space was trying to find moments to nurture the relationship rather than falling into the humdrum of the daily routine. It was hard at first, particularly while living in a team but we managed it. **Doing some kind of project together can help bring an appreciation for your partnership.** Shane and I made a vegetable patch and worked on it together each Sunday. It actually looked great by the end of the mission (but tasted awful!).

ANDREW CADLE

LOGISTICIAN

Ask yourself what is the most good you can do in this given situation. It could be reading about a subject to further your work or personal goals, or investing in the people you are confined with, learning a new language, corresponding with friends and family... To me the personal reward of pursuing this "most good" is helpful in keeping me motivated

SAMAN PERERA

PROJECT COORDINATOR

Now is the time to be kind to yourself, and by extension, to each other. Take the time you need to sit with and process your emotions and reach out for professional help if you are overwhelmed.

You still have some control in your life and it is important to focus on this. **As MSF staff, we know what it's like to not be in control.** We regularly deal with curfews, extended stays in the safety room, and limited movements. Most of us already have plenty of practice making the most out of difficult situations and this Coronavirus situation is no different. e.g.: it may be helpful to think, "Even though I am painfully bored, what activities can I do that I genuinely enjoy, even in quarantine?" or "I know that I am lonely, but is there an old friend that I have not reached out to in a long time?" or even "The gym is off limits and I am frustrated, but can I start running for the first time?" You may not be able to control everything, but **you can make an concerted effort to steer your thoughts into a more positive direction.**

And finally, it may be important to refocus some of your thoughts in difficult moments. **Consider starting a gratitude practice or journal.**

Having an attitude of gratitude and appreciation helps because there is always something or someone to be grateful for, no matter what the circumstances. Is there a favorite coworker at your hospital that you will get to see today? Are there wonderful things about your children or parents that you are just now discovering because of this crisis? Purposefully **looking for the good (instead of the bad) in a situation can be a deeply healing experience.**



Photo: Christophe Da Silva, CAR, 2016

ANTIGONE PANTANIZOPOULOS

NURSE ACTIVITY MANAGER

I found **writing mass e-mails back home to friends and family** or just individuals really helped me to talk about what I was seeing and doing. It helps with putting a perspective on it because you are explaining it to people who are not seeing and doing what you are doing. It also helps when you come home because your friends and family already have an idea and context of your mission. **Looking at old pictures and videos** on my laptop and phone takes my mind outside for a bit. **Meditation apps like Headspace in the morning** before I start my day were helpful to give me a few minutes of stillness. I would also do a 15-minute yoga practice with an extended sivasana before I would get ready for the day. Even just a headstand when i didn't have time in the mornings made me feel better. Whatever it is you choose to do, it's important to give yourself 10-15 minutes in the morning (or whenever depending on your schedule) to just have some awake quiet time. **Calling PSCU for some perspective.**