



Remote mental health services in Qatar

The COVID-19 pandemic and the necessary measures of staying at home and maintaining physical distancing instilled fear and anxiety among the public in Qatar, leading to adverse effects on mental health and overall well-being. Furthermore, individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions experienced heightened symptoms due to the stressful circumstances of the pandemic. In response, the Ministry of Public Health, in collaboration with the Primary Health Care Corporation and Hamad Medical Corporation, took proactive steps to address this issue by establishing and launching a helpline specifically designed to provide support to individuals facing mental health problems resulting from the ongoing pandemic. The success of this intervention relied on the crucial collaboration between key stakeholders and partners.

The tele-psychiatry helpline is staffed with a team of mental health professionals who are equipped to assess the needs of callers and offer appropriate support. Callers are categorized into four main groups: children and parents; adults; older individuals; and frontline healthcare

workers. The helpline operates through three levels of intervention:

1. The first level involves triaging to evaluate the needs of individuals based on their demographic information and complaints.
2. The second level focuses on providing psychological support to callers.
3. The third level entails referring individuals to specialized psychiatric services for further management. The helpline also coordinates the home delivery of psychiatric medications.

In addition to the helpline, awareness campaigns were launched through social media and dedicated websites to raise public awareness about mental health and well-being. These campaigns aimed to provide information on how and where to seek help when needed, as well as offer tips for maintaining mental well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through these initiatives, efforts were made to reduce stigma surrounding mental health and normalize conversations about it. The helpline provided individuals with easier access to mental health services, creating a safe space devoid of stigma and judgment. As a result of its positive impact, the Ministry of Public Health in Qatar plans to sustain the helpline beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and integrate tele-psychiatry and the helpline as integral components of the national mental health services.

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