

## *Message from Co-Chair of Combined Issue*

### **COVID-19 and its impact on mental health**

**Sally W C Chan and Andrew M H Siu**

At the time of writing this editorial, many places in the world such as Europe and North America have entered the endemic state of the COVID-19 outbreak. We do not know when COVID-19 will come to an end. The next stage remains highly uncertain in Hong Kong with the winter season coming. The World Health Organization (WHO) reminds us that although the COVID-19 pandemic is, in the first instance, a physical health crisis, it has the seeds of a major mental health crisis as well. The mental health and wellbeing of many societies, including Hong Kong, have been severely impacted by this crisis and are a priority to be addressed urgently (WHO, 2022).

Mental health problems exist along a continuum from mild, time-limited distress to severe mental health conditions. Many people who previously coped well, are now less able to cope because of the multiple stressors generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who previously had few experiences of anxiety and distress, may experience an increase in number and intensity of these and some have developed a mental health condition. And those who previously had a mental health condition, may experience a worsening of their condition and reduced functioning. Specific high risk population groups are showing high degrees of COVID-19-related psychological distress. For example, frontline healthcare workers have been exposed to numerous stressors. Older adults and people with pre-existing health conditions who are terrified, and lonely. Emotional difficulties among children and adolescents are exacerbated by family stress, disrupted education and uncertainty about

their futures (Patel, Saxena, Lund, et al., 2018; WHO, 2022).

To minimize the mental health consequences of the pandemic, United Nations (2020) recommended rapid implementation of the following actions by national decision-makers to ensure people and societies are better protected from the mental health impact of COVID-19:

- Apply a whole-of-society approach to promote, protect and care for mental health
- Ensure widespread availability of emergency mental health and psychosocial support
- Support recovery from COVID-19 by building mental health services for the future

In this combined 2021 and 2022 issue, we present discussion and research papers relating to the impact of COVID-19 on mental health of Hong Kong people. The papers also explored how we could implement United Nations' recommended actions in Hong Kong. This combined issue also present papers on the application of Forest Therapy, Horticultural Therapy and Animal-Assisted Therapy in mental health promotion.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue. The editorial team would also like to encourage readers to submit articles to our coming issues. We wish the *Hong Kong Journal of Mental Health* becomes your choice of publishing your scholarly work and sharing your experience with our readers. We welcome manuscripts on discussion, literature review, case studies and research. The Editorial Board also welcomes your feedback and suggestions.

## Sally W C Chan and Andrew M H Siu

### References

- Patel, V., Saxena, S., Lund, C., Thomicroft, G., Baingna, F., Bolton, P., et al., (2018). The Lancet Commission on global mental health and sustainable development, *The Lancet*, 393:10157, 1551-1598. Doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31612-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31612-X). [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)31612-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)31612-X/fulltext)
- United Nations (2020). *Policy Brief: COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health*. New York, US: United Nations. <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/UN-Policy-Brief-COVID-19-and-mental-health.pdf>
- World Health Organisation (WHO) (2022). Mental Health and COVID-19: Early evidence of the pandemic's impact, scientific brief. Geneva: WHO. [https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci\\_Brief-Mental\\_health-2022.1](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci_Brief-Mental_health-2022.1)