

Mental Health Center makes room for increased call volume

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Moving appointments to video or phone

By Katherine Nettles

As even the most unfazed of citizens have recently found themselves hoarding toilet paper or at least stocking up on food supplies, perusing news articles about the science and spread of COVID-19, and second-guessing any newly developing cough, all while practicing social distancing and facing economic fallout, it is undeniably a time of increased anxiety for most of the world. Now more than ever, mental health professionals find themselves offering support to people with new, developing or existing needs.

Kirsten Mau, director of marketing and communications for the Center for Mental Health, says it has been a busy time for the center at a regional and local level. Kari Commeford director of the Gunnison County Substance Abuse Prevention Program (GCSAPP), said that while her organization has not seen an uptick in calls, the county's call center has received many inquiries from people stressed by their symptoms and the uncertainty of whether or not they have COVID-19 in the absence of definitive tests. Call center workers have worked to reassure people and encourage them to remain calm. The organizations are both working to remain open and available to all community members as needed, while also pivoting to comply with county-wide health and public safety restrictions on in-person meetings.

"Obviously, our first priority has been seeing clients," explains Mau. And for those who find themselves in need of a little extra support right now, Same Day Access is for new clients who are not in crisis but want to get started with services.

The center's CEO, Shelly Spalding, posted an update earlier this week, stating, "We have established an internal COVID-19 Response Team composed of leaders from various areas of our organization to interact effectively with state and local agencies across our six-county region."

"Given the situation in Gunnison County and Crested Butte, we are moving all appointments to telephone or video so that we can continue to serve our clients even while our physical location is closed. We are outreaching our clients individually on this. We'd like to ensure the community knows how to access crisis services," Spalding writes.

Commerford offers this advice as well: "It is an interesting time, and we have the opportunity to help shape how it impacts us, especially our kids. It is important to engage in positive experiences with our children – playing board games, playing outdoors, spending family time. Find ways to stay connected while keeping healthy and following the public health orders. Talk on the phone instead of texting. Most important unplug if you can, listening to and watching media right now can perpetuate stress and anxiety."

Anyone experiencing a mental health crisis can call the Crisis Line at (970) 252-6220, reach out to Colorado Crisis Services at 1-844-493-8255 or text "TALK" to 38255.