

What are the consequences for mental health in this period of confinement? Added value of medical spas, health resorts in Europe #europeanspas

Abstract: Individual and collective psychological management during this health crisis should not be underestimated. Indeed, no one is immune to a lack of psychological adaptation in the face of an unexpected crisis situation. We are currently experiencing several combined traumas: the fear of disease, the violence of information and the anguish of confinement. The latter, although necessary, leads or will lead to the development of different forms of pathological anxiety, reactive depressive states and post-traumatic stress.

In time, we will have to find solutions adapted to these new sufferings induced by this prolonged stress. The thermal spas which are places prepared and accustomed to receive people presenting a chronic psychic suffering can and must prepare themselves for such an action. The hour of need is approaching.

A global health crisis : The health crisis that we are going through will act, on the psychic level, in different waves. First of all, it is a health crisis; and what is more important, more precious, more frightening than our health? We can see this clearly today, when everything is coming to a halt, including the general economy throughout the world.

It is also a crisis that refers to our unconscious but present fear of the end of the world and to a sense, rightly or wrongly, of possible punishment. Apart from wars, no other cause, no doubt, has so far caused such trauma. And this is also to the credit or (at fault) of modern communication tools that "force" us to follow this daily disastrous countdown!

Heavy psychological consequences : If everyone understands the need for imposed confinement, it is and will certainly cause serious psychological problems for our fellow citizens. Traumatic psychological impacts and effects are very often perceived with a delay, which makes it difficult to discern and legitimize them.

We are currently experiencing several combined traumas:

- Fear of illness and the associated risk of death; a fear that refers, phylogenetically, to our worst existential anxieties.
- The violence of overinformation that freezes us in the obsession of these fears.
- The quarantine phenomenon that puts us in a state of boredom and general trauma.

Man is a social being, by definition. In the total and prolonged absence of social interaction, there is a risk that it will gradually plunge into imbalance.

Initially, suffering will express itself in the form of anguish and its vicious circles: insomnia, fatigue, psychosomatic complaints of atypical pain, oppression, discomfort. Frequently, these states can lead to reactive depressive states where a sense of discouragement or even despair can set in. Then, even later, we will see the onset of real forms of post-traumatic stress disorder often accompanied by prolonged depressive states, nightmares and panic attacks. All in all, the entire profession agrees that there will eventually be a deluge of post-traumatic stress.

"Psychic Covid": the first results

A survey delivered by the *Shanghai Mental Health Centre* on the psychological distress of the Chinese during the epidemic gives the dimension of the problem already in place: 35% of the people questioned said they had experienced psychological distress and 5% had suffered severe disorders (even suicidal intent).

The famous American magazine, "*The Lancet*", recently compiled 3166 articles on the psychological impact of "quarantines" in ten countries. It reports numerous psychological effects, mainly post-traumatic stress states, confusion and pathological, reactive anger states.

Some studies have even revealed the persistence, for up to 3 years, of the after-effects of post-traumatic stress and major depression. An *Opinion Way survey of 2,000 French employees*, conducted these days at the request of Empreinte Humaine, a firm specialising in the prevention of psycho-social risks, confirms this alarming information: 44% of French employees are said to be in a situation of psychological distress (26%, moderate and 18%, high), whether they are teleworkers, technically unemployed or in their workplace. They mainly complain of an increased mental burden, role overlapping and anxiety about the future.

The main sources of stress are: hyper connection, paradoxical overload of work (favoured by uncertainty), difficulties in harmonizing work and private life, excessive mental fatigue. Many teleworkers also have difficulty finding a job in good conditions.

A great opportunity to rethink the world

For us psychiatrists, this crisis evokes another question: beyond the infectious disease and the cascading psychic consequences that it will inevitably entail, we must ask ourselves what this crisis also reveals about our lives.

Everyone acknowledges that our lifestyles have changed profoundly in a century; and even faster in the last 5 decades; and not only technologically.

We gradually entered a perpetual movement, with our eyes glued to our laptops, in a thirst for control of everything around us and everything we care about. This giant crisis is an opportunity to step back and reset ourselves.

Facing the demand - the role of thermal centers and health resorts

In order to cope with these rapidly growing psychological needs, in the coming months, it will be necessary to find places where people can be cared for and to set up suitable psychological programmes. Preferably non-stigmatizing places that ensure the reduction of symptoms and offer the necessary psychological support for their needs.

What is better than the **thermal centres specialized in mental health** to bring the ideal conditions to cumulate these three objectives: **symptomatic care - psychological support - destigmatization**? In **Medical spa of Saujon (France)** for example, we have been working since the beginning of the year with an army training hospital, a reference in France, on the treatment of soldiers with long-term post-traumatic stress disorder. We are working together on the specific psycho-educational program for these patients.

Such a project could and should naturally be adapted to the specificities of post-traumatic stress in confined patients following Covid-19 infection. In particular, it will include an analysis of the defence mechanisms put in place by each individual and work on the potential resilience processes to be developed.

The ESPA Innovation Award winner **Heilsustofnun (Iceland)**, medical spa in Iceland has developed a “Stress Free Living” management program and has resulted in excellent outcome. The goal of the program is to assist clients referred to the clinic to heal and recover from their burnout/exhaustion, teach them ways to take care of their own health, manage future stress and get them back out in the workforce, healthy. It is also about increasing health awareness, increase physical skills and endurance, reduce physical pain, improve mental health and improve quality of life. Individual support is provided to motivate permanent lifestyle change and clients have access to a psychiatric nurse after discharge for follow up as needed. The program starts every morning with Mindfulness meditation, followed by exercise classes or lectures on psychological issues (anxiety, depression, emotional wellness etc) and long walks in the unspoiled nature. In the afternoon there are comprehensive educational programs to learn to recognize their own stressors, what creates them, symptoms, and ways to learn how to live without them.

Signature elements, such as balneotherapy, peloid treatment, vegetarian food, GMO free locally grown vegetables, unique nature and the overall holistic approach to maintaining and improving overall health was essential when developing this innovative approach. Geothermal heat is utilized in the swimming pools and balneotherapy treatments, as well as for growing own organic vegetables. Locally harvested mud for peloid therapy has been one of the trademarks at Heilsustofnun for over 60 years, and peloid therapy was integrated into the programs as a way of pain management tool and for relaxation.

The ways to measure the efficiency of the programs are following:

- Quality of Life Scale: International scale used to measure improvement in Quality of Life over a certain time period (3-4 weeks). QOLS is measured at the beginning and end of each client’s stay and show improvement in QOLS and significant improvement in overall health.
- Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), measured at the beginning and end of each client’s stay. Results have shown significant decrease in both depression and anxiety.
- Life Stress Test, used as an educational tool in the beginning of treatment to evaluate stressors in one's life.

Publications like *The change of well-being associated with spa therapy* with results suggest that spa therapy may be a powerful tool in enhancing well-being in progressed middle aged adults with common health impairments. Other medical research with Balneology treatments to health mental problems you can find in the European Spas Association e-library: <http://www.espalibrary.eu/>, www.europeanspas.eu

Mental problems caused by home quarantine can weaken the immune system, making the body more vulnerable. Read our previous news about COVID 19: <https://www.europeanspas.eu/en/newsletter>

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