Monitoring mental health clients

If people have a history of pre-existing severe and enduring mental health issues (psychotic illness, bipolar, major depression etc) and are already vulnerable to relapse, this risk will increase during the next few months.

You may also have clients with existing significant mental health issues who might not be linked in with statutory mental health services. Considering the changes and increased social isolation, we need to be mindful of the increased risk of deterioration (otherwise known as relapse) to their mental health.

Two primary factors contribute to a relapse of a mental illness:
1. the absence of prescribed treatment including medication and,
2. stress (whether that from substance / alcohol misuse and/or significant changes in the environment)

In a briefing note on addressing mental health and psychosocial aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak from the World Health Organisation (WHO) Inter Agency Standing Committee (2 March 2020); experience indicates that persons in quarantine who can make choices during their day (e.g. meal choices), have access to structured activities, have a routine and receive information updates (on notice boards or through text messages) are likely to cope better than individuals confined to an isolated area with decreased autonomy. Integrating a psychosocial approach to establishing quarantine sites will significantly contribute to the well-being of quarantined persons and their families.

Residents should be asked the following **monitoring questions** on arrival. Staff should be aware that some residents may answer 'no' to these questions but have significant mental health problems which they are unaware of or reluctant to disclose.

1. Are they currently under the care of a mental health team?
    o If yes, contact current mental health team to plan continuing support, either "long armed" from current team or via local services
    o Ask if they have a care plan that they are willing to share with staff

2. Are they currently on any medication for their mental health?
    o If yes, ensure that this is confirmed with prescriber and continued

3. Do they feel they have any mental health problems?
    o If yes, ask for details & what support they feel they need

Staff can check on residents' mental health by:
1. Asking residents how they are feeling/coping.
    o have they had thoughts of self-harm/suicide?
2. Checking their sleep patterns/eating patterns
3. Being alert to unusual behaviour e.g.
    o shouting in room,
    o gesticulating when no one is around,
    o becoming distressed when interacting with others,
    o struggling to stay and wanting to leave,
    o becoming more withdrawn

If staff are concerned about a client's mental health the onward route will depend upon local services available but options to consider are:

- o Discussion with the covering primary health team
- o If the hotel has dedicated mental health support, discussion with/referral to that team
- o The local Mental Health Trust may have a crisis line (often 24 hours). If it is unclear whether this is available – call 111 for advice.
- o **If there are immediate concerns about someone's safety – e.g. risk to life - emergency services (police/ambulance) should be involved**

For somebody with a severe and enduring mental illness it will be useful to know what previous triggers for deterioration were:

Early Warning Signs – symptoms evident early on in the deterioration
Acute Symptoms – symptoms experienced when they required intervention from acute mental health services incl hospitalization
Risk – what risks presented to self or others when they were acutely unwell.

If you can make contact with their existing team and get this information you will be in a better position to develop a plan that will mitigate the risk of deterioration (by intervening often with strategies to prevent a relapse) as well as interventions when the client is more acutely distressed.

All clients should be given a crisis emergency number as defined by their existing team.

Free online resources
On behalf of Public Health England Office for London, Thrive LDN is coordinating the public mental health response to COVID-19 in London to support the mental health and resilience of Londoners during and after the pandemic.
Good Thinking, is working with Thrive LDN to provide a comprehensive digital support offer for Londoners around mental health and coronavirus. Good Thinking provides free digital mental wellbeing support for London. The service promotes self-care for common mental health conditions, including anxiety, low mood, sleeping difficulties and stress.