

# VIRTUAL CARE

How virtual care is supporting our members' mental health

With Cigna's Patricia Gil Millán



The clinical team contributes to the health, well-being and peace of mind of our customers through services such as clinical case management and chronic condition support. We spoke to Patricia, Senior Nurse Case Manager, to ask her about how Cigna supports its members' mental well-being virtually through this service.

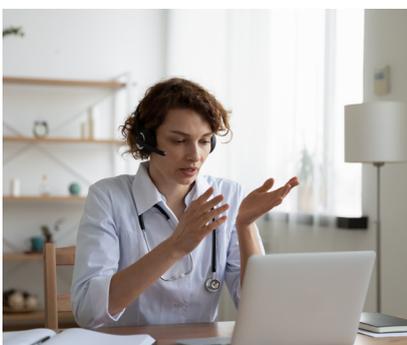
**Thank you very much for talking us today. Would you be able to outline how the clinical case management service provides for members with mental health issues?**

Mental health case managers focus on those most vulnerable in our society such as people with psychiatric illnesses, substance abuse problems or other personal challenges. Our main role is to advocate for those who may be unable to do so for themselves.

Think of mental health case managers as the safety net that helps to catch people who are in trouble. The purpose of the mental health case manager is to connect clients to resources that can considerably improve the quality of their lives.

**What do you think the role of health services companies such as Cigna should be in mental health services?**

Cigna, through the case managers, helps members to comfortably and smoothly reintegrate into society. Mental health case managers work remotely, yet intimately, with their patients to develop treatment plans that are properly targeted at the patient's needs. This involves a thorough assessment of the patient's psychosocial triggers, strengths and personal needs.



Case managers typically coordinate their databases of resources and other public or free-of-charge care providers to better help respective clients achieve their own complicated and evolving personal goals.

Routine activities and responsibilities in the job of a mental health case manager include assessing patients' needs and support systems; planning for crises and helping clients develop coping mechanisms; explaining these scenarios and the

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associated concerns with compassion; and coordinating and monitoring the use of these services. Furthermore, Cigna nurse case managers have a role in raising awareness, reducing stigma and creating a safe atmosphere to discuss mental health issues.

### **What are some of the most effective tools available virtually today to support people with mental health problems?**

Information, guidance, physiotherapy, community support groups, peer support, social media, apps and some complementary therapies.

### **The evidence shows that those with a chronic condition are more at risk of developing mental health issues such as depression. How does the clinical case management service preempt this?**

Chronic medical illness is consistently associated with an increased prevalence of depressive symptoms and disorders, and can significantly increase the overall burden of illness in patients.

The presence of a chronic medical illness may reduce the likelihood of physicians or other health care providers recognizing or treating depression. The demands of chronic illness management may crowd concerns of depression out of the visit agenda. Providers may also not look beyond a chronic medical illness to explain non-specific symptoms, such as fatigue or poor concentration. Even when they recognize symptoms of depression, they may defer treatment, believing that “anyone would be depressed” in such a situation.

Case management helps lead to a greater increase in medication adherence, and quality of life. The case manager contacts the patient for telephone monitoring. Based on a structured interview, the case manager will ask the patient about the status of depression, adherence, side effects of medication and goal attainment.

It is known that case management through individual interviews, home visits, psychosocial skills training and family education decreased the need for hospitalization, diminished symptom severity, improved social functioning and raised quality of life of patients and their caregivers.

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### **The global COVID-19 pandemic has changed everything, and greatly increased people’s engagement with virtual services. How do you think this could be harnessed to support those receiving mental health care now and in the future? What mental health services could be offered virtually?**

Many people are facing increasing mental health issues as lockdowns and social distancing measures continue to disrupt social interactions and day-to-day activities. Mental health care providers have also had to adapt to these measures to keep servicing a growing need for support.

Initiatives on social media platforms have been launched to raise awareness and encourage positive conversation around mental health, while solutions like telehealth have been rapidly expanded to treat patients remotely.

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they are worried about their jobs and trying to balance work and life, they are simultaneously struggling to maintain a healthy diet, not getting enough sleep and worrying about finances. Being able to access online support can have a massive impact on how people cope with these extremely difficult circumstances.

#### **As people return to their places of work, what mental health conditions do you expect to see?**

Measures taken by governments to control the pandemic such as lockdown and social distancing will have a significant impact upon the employees. It is very possible that these mental health implications will be felt for many months or even years.

Early research into the health impacts of lockdown including findings of fatigue, musculoskeletal conditions, poor work-life balance, reduced exercise and increased alcohol consumption. With regards to mental health specifically, employees have been reporting reduced motivation, loss of purpose and motivation, anxiety and isolation.

#### **What do you think employers, directors and managers can do to support the workforce?**

Employers will need to adopt a range of measures to support employees experiencing poor mental health as a result of the pandemic's effects on society and the economy. Measures will need to range from supporting employees to regain an effective work-life balance and addressing fears about return to work, right through to support for severe mental health conditions.

Cigna has the Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) that offers resources and professional counseling for mental health and substance use.<sup>1</sup> Many peer-support services are available to provide support virtually. You can get online therapy and ongoing support from a licensed therapist.<sup>2</sup> These services include the launch of virtual psychiatric clinics for patients in the outpatient clinic, the development of virtual pharmacy services, the provision of remote guidance for psychiatric drugs and medicine home delivery services or apps.

#### **The pandemic has obviously created a lot of anxiety and stress within the general population. How important do you think virtual mental well-being services will be as we adjust to this 'new world'?**

People are suddenly isolated indoors with no connection to the outside world, leaving them feeling stressed, anxious and unable to focus. And while



Employers can conduct stress risk assessments using employee surveys, to review and support the emotional well-being of the whole team. It is important that managers stay alert to the potential workplace triggers for distress such as; people not taking breaks, a high pressure environment, lone working and job insecurity. Employers and managers can show empathy and understanding, listen carefully and actively, ask simple and open questions, make people feel comfortable, embed confidentiality, be flexible and make sure they are available to offer support and to talk.

Written by: **Cigna Wellbeing**

With special thanks to:



**Patricia Gil Millán**, Senior Nurse Case Manager.

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2. Cigna offers global telehealth in partnership with Teladoc. All doctors are licensed in the countries where they practice medicine and are fully qualified and trained to provide this service. Telehealth services may not be available in all jurisdictions. Providers are solely responsible for any treatment provided and are not affiliated with Cigna. Telehealth providers are separate from your health plan's provider network.

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