

COVID-19:

Care and well-being of the volunteers



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I. INTRODUCTION

Faced with the present scenario regarding Coronavirus (COVID-19), **a series of measures and recommendations has been compiled to promote the self-care and welfare of the volunteers** in this situation, **aimed at the Activity Leaders and Managers of Volunteers**, with the purpose of facilitating the care of volunteers facing emotional difficulties and to promote well-being in this situation that confronts us.

There are special difficulties in promoting well-being, as this is a situation in which physical contact between people is limited to those cases where it is strictly necessary. This hinders several of the face-to-face pillars of psycho-social support and the promotion of well-being, such as one-to-one support (Buddy-System), Briefing (technical information and situation management meetings), or Defusing (informal mutual psycho-social support meetings at the end of the day). Therefore, in this situation, we must be creative in transforming these activities to be able to carry them out, without putting our health, and that of the community, at risk. It is not in vain that protocols, procedures and new formulas have emerged from huge crises, which have let us grow as an Institution. We now have a new opportunity to continue growing and to strengthen ourselves.

II. BASICS

- Feel that the Institution is concerned about the volunteers and offers them support, including the psychological support, training and information that they need.
- The interests of the volunteers, with respect to their own well-being, faced with the implicit or explicit demand for care and attention in this situation.
- The need to spread the Institution's adopted strategies and measures among all its members.
- Receive information on the strengthened well-being strategy, in view of the COVID-19 scenario.
- Have a general view of the welfare of the volunteers, understanding that they will not only be affected by their volunteer action, but by everything about this situation in all the different scenarios (individual, activity, communitarian).
- Volunteers can experience hostility from the population and the stakeholders, and could be accused of not providing the tools necessary to protect people, or even of putting the health of their environment at risk with their activity.

III. CARE SCENARIOS

Universality

Unity

Volunteering

Independence

Neutrality

Impartiality

Humanity



Individual

- A volunteer who is affected by the death of someone from coronavirus with whom they have dealt with in their volunteer work.
- A volunteer who has been exposed to the virus and is therefore concerned about contagion.
- A volunteer who is affected by negative responses to the aid given (fear of contagion, downloading of fears or hoaxes demanding aid, or services impossible to provide under the current situation, etc.)
- Volunteers who have contracted the virus.



Activity

Volunteers who are working as part of the essential services in this crisis.



Community

- Volunteers generally who are affected by rumours and fear.
- Volunteers who have halted their activity and have the desire to continue conducting their voluntary work.



IV. **Individual** RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT THE VOLUNTEER

Volunteers can become affected by different situations derived from the coronavirus crisis. Some of the most common reactions that we find in this situation are:

- **Fear**
- **Stigmatisation**

Information provides security

To minimise the effects this produces, it is important **to maintain truthful, concrete and continuous information channels**, helping to diminish fear and uncertainty among the volunteers and, very importantly, among their family and surroundings, thereby avoiding stigmatisation. Promote control, with training and information.



-----Security Distance-----



DETECT INDIVIDUAL UNEASE

To detect situations of unease it is important that we make the assessment together with the volunteer. You can be guided by the following warning **signs to detect if your volunteer is having difficulties** in confronting the situation, taking into account that these signs are not always visible, and are not exclusively indicative of a stress situation. This is why other reasons, that might be causing these signs (states of health or problems of another nature), will have to be ruled out:

Physical signs:

- Excessive tiredness
- Headaches
- Sleep disorders
- Changes in appetite
- Diarrhoea, abdominal pain or back spasms, that are not explained by other causes
- Increased heart rate, accelerated breathing (hyperventilation), perspiration, tremors, without just cause

Emotional signs:

- Anxiety, Nervousness, Tension or Agitation, with the sensation of imminent danger and/or panic
- Frustration
- Guilt
- Recurrent or unexpected changes in moods
- Excessive euphoria
- Need of permanent communication
- Unfounded pessimism or optimism
- Irritability, rage
- Episodes of weeping
- Nightmares
- Apathy
- Sadness

Signs at the Cognitive Level:

- Cannot stop thinking about anything else other than the disease, or the worry about becoming ill
- Difficulty in concentrating on, or in being interested in, other subjects
- Forgetfulness
- Poor performance of tasks
- Fear paralyzes them and does not allow them to go out
- Negative attitude
- Loss of creativity
- Loss of motivation, deep disappointment
- Lower self-esteem, negative self-criticisms
- Boredom
- Paranoid thoughts

- Maintain a state of continuous alert, analysing their physical sensations and interpreting them as disease symptoms, when it is in fact a normal or habitual state
- Difficulty in controlling their concern, which is expressed by means of persistent questions about their state of health.

Relationship signs:

- Unexplained lack of family and social relationships (does not telephone, or stay in touch with their loved ones)
- Resentment
- Intolerance
- Problems relating to companions, or with family or partner

Behavioural signs:

- Greater consumption of alcohol, tobacco or drugs
- Changed eating habits
- Risk-taking behaviour
- Hyperactivity
- Unexplained trend to avoid situations, in which they show exacerbated fear which would normally be dealt with
- Cynicism
- Need to keep seeing and hearing information on this subject

BASIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Before beginning, take into account what is important:

1. Have they experienced distressing events in their voluntary work? It is important that the person knows that there is follow-up and monitoring, and that we are concerned about their well-being.
2. If that is the case, it should be addressed as soon as possible, thereby guaranteeing that our support is more effective. Extending our intervention over time can increase the unease, generate a breakdown of ideals, in terms of those shared with the Institution and, ultimately, feeling unappreciated or betrayed by the organisation.
3. Decide who is the right person to give this support. It is important that it is someone with whom they can feel comfortable expressing concerns or feelings.

4. Ensure surroundings which guarantee privacy and confidentiality.

In order to provide good support, we recommended the following guidelines:

- Find out if they know of the existence of self-care or support measures and if they are using them (for example, one-to-one support, internal or external psycho-social support). Ask if they consider these measures sufficient or if they need additional help.
- Find out if they have support at home or from personal networks. Encourage the volunteer to accept support from their loved ones.
- Identify thoughts that can generate unease. For example, constantly thinking about the disease can cause symptoms to appear, or to be accentuated, which increases emotional unease.
- Help the volunteer to recognise their emotions and accept them. Encourage them to share their situation with those closest to them to find the help and support that they need.
- Encourage incoming information to be questioned, by means of the contribution of data from official sources, avoiding the propagation of rumours and alarmist information and images.
- Avoid information overload, advising people to not keep reading or listening about COVID-19, as it could unnecessarily increase their sensation of risk and nervousness.
- Promote a sense of humour and positivism, joking with them on the subject will help them to overcome negative emotions, such as fear.
- Recommend that they continue with their daily routines, as far as possible, introducing the necessary changes and providing new elements that make them feel in control of their day-to-day activities. Give special emphasis to the importance of promoting sleep routines: Those that are used to telling their bodies that it is time to sleep (having dinner / supper or showering at regular times, having a set bedtime, etc.). Negative thoughts trouble us more at night, due to the lack of other stimuli, for this reason, it helps to ensure that episodes of insomnia do not occur during which many negative thoughts can arise.

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SELF-CARE ADVICE THAT CAN BE GIVEN:

- Maintain an objective attitude.
- Avoid always speaking about the subject.
- Get support from your family and friends.
- Use official sources and seek information verified by experts: Official Organisations, the World Health Organization, etc.
- Do not contribute to the dissemination of hoaxes and fake news. Do not feed your fear nor that of others. Suitable information will give us control over the situation, making our fear more manageable.
- Try to live a normal life and continue with routines as much as possible, if necessary, you can change some tasks for others that you can do without exposing yourself to more stress.
- If you perform voluntary work, virtually or remotely, organise your space and your time to clearly differentiate it from other areas of your personal life, such as leisure time, family relationships, etc.
- Try to maintain a healthy diet, avoid excessive alcohol consumption and exercise at home.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE HIGHER-RISK POPULATION

Considering the groups at risk, it is important to facilitate the possibility of carrying out actions from home, either virtually or remotely, to those people who wish to continue volunteering, but who are within the groups at risk.

The at-risk groups are those people who present:

- Chronic respiratory illness
- Decompensated chronic pathologies (diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases)
- Immunosuppressed people
- Pregnant women
- Chronic Pluripathology
- People over 60 years old

For these people, in addition to the basic recommendations, we will also take into account the following more specific advice:

- Help them to follow the recommendations and prevention measures determined by the health authorities.

- Inform them realistically of the risks.
- Help them to become aware of the risk responsibly, without alarming them, which will help them to exert certain control on the situation. Faced with isolation, assure ourselves that they have support that can help them, in case of need.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN CASE OF HAVING CONTRACTED CORONAVIRUS

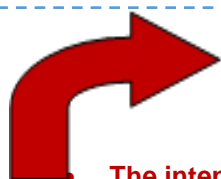
In addition to the basic recommendations, we will consider:

1. Helping them to manage their negative thoughts. Help them to be realistic, to be aware that the vast majority of people are being cured.
2. When they feel afraid, help them to remember difficult moments in which, with their abilities and skills, they have carried on, and remind them of all those diseases which have been cured.
3. If they feel afraid of infecting, or of having infected other people, remind them that the virus is highly contagious and that nobody is, nor should feel, guilty.



MAKE MONITORING CALLS

Attempt to transmit your sincere concern, not only from the health sphere, but from the emotional, transmitting affection and security to them, to the extent that the relationship allows, at both the personal and Institutional level.



REFERRAL

How to know if we have to make a referral:

- **The intensity of the symptoms does not reduce after 4 - 6 weeks.**
- **If radical changes of personality are detected.**
- **The symptoms are tending to increase and/or intensify.**
- **Big problems arise in the work, in the family and social spheres.**
- **The volunteer expressly requests it.**
- **If we are not capable of giving a response ourselves.**

In this case, it will be necessary to refer to the different specialised resources in each area. For this:

1st Obtain permission: Inform the volunteer of the intention to refer them: Make them aware that we are interested in them and explain the reasons for the referral. We must remember our commitment to confidentiality and make it easier for the volunteer to feel comfortable, without their consent, we cannot make a referral.

2nd If you have an option, present the different possibilities of referral to the interested person: Talk about aspects such as place of care, accessibility, whether it is an internal or external resource to the Institution, etc.

3rd Assure the person that they will continue to be supported until completing the referral.



V. **Activity** RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CARRYING OUT VOLUNTEER WORK

In line with our fundamental principles, the Red Cross has to ensure the maintenance of the essential services of its activity. For this, it is recommended to consider the following measures:

IMPLEMENT MEASURES WHICH PROMOTE THE PERCEPTION OF CONTROL

- Encourage volunteers to continue developing their activity remotely, or virtually, from their homes, so that they can continue to feel useful in this situation.
- Follow the preventive measure guidelines determined by the Health Authorities, promoting tranquillity (we know what we are doing).
- Inform the volunteers of the safety measures that are being taken in the location where the activity is undertaken (cleaning, logistics, fitting-out or change of spaces, etc.).
- Inform and train on the tasks to be undertaken. In addition, it is highly recommendable to hold periodic online meetings. If they are unavoidably face-to-face, maximise the hygiene and safety measures. These types of meetings serve to motivate and to stimulate the sense of belonging.
- Provide the necessary resources for the development of the voluntary work.

CARE IN EMERGENCY ACTIVITIES

Understanding that there are activities in a crisis context, the care of the volunteers who are conducting emergency actions must be maximised:

- Prepare the volunteers by means of informative sessions with respect to what they might encounter and detect if they are prepared for the task that they have ahead.
- Communicate individually and periodically with the volunteers, being interested in how they are confronting the situation and whether they need additional support.

Eating

- Independent of the possible lack of hunger, it is necessary that the volunteers eat adequately and periodically. They should eat at least 3 meals a day.
- Between meals, opt for healthy snacks, such as nuts or fresh fruit, avoiding the industrial pastries, chips or other processed foods.
- Good hydration is important. Drink water, fruit juices or tea. Avoid energy drinks and those with caffeine.
- Do not provide doughy (difficult to swallow), very sweet or bitter foods, etc. A variety of fresh foods is advisable (vegetables, fruit).
- Pay attention to the stress response behaviours related to the ingestion of food, which usually appear as a sensation of permanent hunger or, a compulsive desire to eat.

Rest

- It is necessary to have resting places where relaxation and safety against infections are guaranteed.
- In cases where shifts could be very long, it is essential to call for inactive volunteers, or new recruits, to reduce the workload hours. Undertake appropriate shifts of activity, respecting breaks.
- Lack of rest increases emotional exacerbation, as well as psychological dullness and physical exhaustion of the person. In circumstances of lack of sleep, increased hallucinations and delusions occur in cases of previous mental health pathologies.
- On some occasions, we have to consider “forcing” the person to take periods of relaxation. It is common for volunteers to feel that they are indispensable, or have the need to continue working, without taking into account their own personal care. It is essential that they know that this situation is going to lengthen in time and that it is essential that they save their strength to be able to continue giving their voluntary action, for as long as this crisis situation remains.
- We do not equate rest with lying down or going to sleep. They must also have leisure time, disconnecting from voluntary action.

SELF-CARE ADVICE THAT CAN BE GIVEN:

- Concentrate on the day-to-day.
- Get support from the team: Consult, share and agree.
- Keep in mind your abilities and skills to resolve situations.
- Your family and friends may be concerned for your safety. Try to provide them with adequate information. Talk openly about concerns and dangers, both real and imagined. Having the understanding and support of your people will make it easier for you to carry out your volunteer action with more tranquillity.
- Use creativity, and remember that the Red Cross is an organisation born out of emergency. In exceptional situations, the Institution has known how to react and implement new protocols and better ways of responding. It is time to innovate and contribute.
- And, above all, remember that this situation also affects us as people. Ask for help if you need it, it does not matter if you have to withdraw for a while to feel better. You will return with renewed strength and you will be of greater help, when other companions fall.

At the end of the health crisis caused by COVID-19, we will continue to improve:

- Evaluate the measures to be taken with the volunteers who have been intervening in this situation, who feel cared for, not only in the process. We are not only talking about recognition, but actions that serve to close this experience and help them normalise their lives. These can be emotional closing meetings, for example, this will strengthen you as a team, the relationships that are generated in these situations usually last over time.
- Evaluate how the people and the team confronted the situation, giving special attention to the support mechanisms.
- It is recommended to make anonymous surveys to find out how the volunteers have confronted the situation. That is, to study what support mechanisms were offered to them and which were used. Also, a focus group can be started up to draw conclusions to improve facing future situations.
- Incentivise meetings with volunteer activity Leaders / Managers to ask their point of view: how they confronted the situation in their team, what was more useful to them and what would they improve.

**Community****VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE VOLUNTEER
COMMUNITY AREA**

- Spread information about the measures and safety procedures.
- Continually transmit truthful information. Refer to official sources, avoiding and resisting hoaxes and rumours.
- It is recommended that the information is transmitted in small doses, we will thus avoid information overload and we will facilitate its assimilation. If possible, the use of simple computer graphics, or short videos, is recommended to focus the attention of our audience and to send direct messages.



VII. DECALOGUE TO PROMOTE WELL-BEING DURING COVID-19

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COVID-19:**DECALOGUE TO PROMOTE
WELFARE DURING COVID-19**

- 1** Inform and train on the tasks to carry out.
- 2** Respect the rest breaks and activity shifts.
- 3** Promote emotional expression.
- 4** Set up spaces to share experiences, concerns, etc. (remotely or virtually), this will help to normalise emotions.
- 5** Provide the necessary equipment to conduct their voluntary work safely.
- 6** Make individual and group recognitions of their actions and share results.
- 7** Maintain fluid communication on the tasks to carry out, so that the volunteers feel cared for. Promote feedback.
- 8** Inform and train on health and safety aspects. Remember that information gives security. The transfer of this information to the families of our volunteers, can often be a focus of important concern that can affect their well-being during the voluntary action.
- 9** Encourage the volunteers who want to take action, they can exert their solidarity, albeit remotely or virtually.
- 10** Promote the creativity, the capacities and competences of the volunteers, promoting personal and group accomplishment.



VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

*In order to produce this document the recommendations of the following **official sources** have been used:*

- *World Health Organization (the WHO),*
- *Official Schools of Psychology*

*Documentation of the **Psycho-Social Centre of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies***

- *Mental health and psycho-social Support for Personnel, volunteers and communities in a new coronavirus outbreak*
- *The care of the volunteers. Set of tools for psycho-social support*

The Spanish Red Cross

- *Immediate Emergency Response Team Psycho-Social Intervention Manual*
- *Stress of the participants in emergencies*