



MOOC 2

Methods

CASE STUDY - GOOD PRACTICE

Emergency Management in a Pandemic Scenario

Instructions for the students

Working in groups, read the case study and answer the questions to complete the activity. It is not necessary to describe the whole process in detail.

In the following case study, you will be provided with a scenario to use in your classroom for an exercise that will last 90 minutes:

- 15 minutes to read the paper.
- 10 minutes to see the video.
- 30 minutes to answer the questions individually or in subgroups.
- 35 minutes for plenary discussion.

Background Scenario Description

In February 2020, in the province of Bergamo – a city located in the northwest of Italy –, there are reports of about 10 cases of atypical meningitis. A few weeks later, the first cases of infection caused by a new kind of Coronavirus are detected. There are more than 120.000 people living in the area. The Local Health Authority of Bergamo and its province is now dealing with the clinical management of hospitalized patients. Doctors and nurses are working non-stop to treat the patients; authorities decide to ask for external help. You are a psychological emergency facilitator, member of an association operating in crisis events and specialized in trauma-focused interventions. Your association is contacted by the local authorities in order to guarantee a more effective and efficient service to citizens and to define an appropriate communication plan. A meeting is called involving the directors of the Local Health Authority of Bergamo and the contact persons from your association.

A few days later, before the meeting between the representatives of the Local Health Authority and your association, the first cases of new Coronavirus are detected and increase exponentially.

Two weeks later, the newspapers report: "The situation is so bad that we are forced to work below our standard of care. Patients wait for hours to get a bed in the Intensive Care Unit. Older patients die alone without appropriate palliative care, and their families are told about their death over the phone, often by a physically and emotionally exhausted doctor that they have never met before."

Doctors of Bergamo hospital report: "We are learning that hospitals can be the main places of Coronavirus transmission. While they rapidly fill up with infected people, they can favor transmission to non-infected patients". Ambulances and medical personnel also become a vector of the disease.

Note:

Bergamo was the province with the highest number of Coronavirus infections in Italy. According to the official data, more than 100 people died in the province of Bergamo in one day, with an average death rate of 50 people per day. The local crematories could no longer handle the high demand for cremations. For this reason, in the evening of Wednesday, March 18th, army vehicles were called to transport the coffins of the people died from Covid-19 to crematories in other cities.

The country will never forget the footage of the procession of the military vehicles loaded with coffins through the empty highways. It has become the most macabre and shocking symbol of the Covid-19 pandemic in Italy.

Significantly, in order to remember the victims of the Coronavirus pandemic, March 18th has been established as a commemoration day by the Italian Government.

The Covid-19 pandemic severely impacted the health care system of Bergamo. Around 50% of health care personnel was infected. The rapidity of the spread of the disease, the higher mortality compared with other areas, and the difficulties of the hospital system are among the most striking elements of this story.

Click on the link to watch the video for further details provided by dr. Stefania Sacchezin, Associazione per l'EMDR Italia facilitator.

Methods, resources and obstacles:

The association you are member of has been operating in crisis events for many years and includes psychologists and psychotherapists specifically trained in trauma-focused interventions.

Your association has been involved to guarantee a more effective and efficient service to citizens and define an appropriate communication plan. A meeting is called with the directors of the Local Health Authority of Bergamo and with personnel from your association.

There are questions about how to best employ psychologists in a situation characterized by high complexity. It is claimed that it is necessary to make the best use of resources derived from highly competent professionals.

Due to the specific features of the crisis event, it is necessary to completely change the procedures and protocols usually applied, set up and structure a service that does not yet exist, create a communication plan with methods and tools different from those usually used, make decisions never taken before, and coordinate and take care of the team through ways and channels that do not involve close physical proximity.

As a psychological emergency facilitator member of an association operating in crisis events, you will be expected to support the Local Health Authority of Bergamo in managing the pandemic, especially concerning coordination, communication, problem solving, decision making, leadership, team building and team caring. The intervention must be global and you will have to foresee several important actions; here below are some objectives to be pursued:

1. Train people in working in an emergency situation (hospital switchboards, municipalities, and emergency services are overwhelmed and the people working there are not trained to deal with the crisis)
2. Support the team of psychologists working in hospitals, who are not prepared for this kind of situation
3. Provide citizens with accurate information about crisis events and pandemics
4. Support health care staff in communicating with the patients' relatives, who will not be able to visit their loved ones and might even never see them again
5. Provide assistance to all the staff that work in close contact with people in dealing with the risk and fear of contagion

Objectives:

As a psychological emergency facilitator member of association operating in psychological crises, your role will be to facilitate coordination inside and outside your agency, supporting stakeholders involved in the crisis event and sharing common objects, methods and competences. The aim is to reduce the disorganization and chaos resulting from a situation characterized by high uncertainty and low predictability.

In addition, time and information are lacking and you will be expected to develop an appropriate and effective communication plan and to provide realistic preparation to the crisis by giving psycho-educational information.

Click on the link to watch the video for further details provided by dr. Stefania Sacchezin, Associazione per l'EMDR in Italia facilitator <https://youtu.be/atMha17EQCo>

Answer the following questions to assess the Emergency Psychology Team Plan in the Coronavirus pandemic period.

External Coordination

- You are invited to attend a meeting with local authorities: what type of intervention do you propose as coordinator of an Emergency Psychology Team during the pandemic?

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- You need to develop an action plan in a situation of great uncertainty and danger, what goals and targets do you set?

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Internal Coordination

- Which approaches do you use to best relate to your group?

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- Which role do you establish within your group? How do you reinforce roles and functions?

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External Communication

- In order to prepare the community to the crisis event and inform the public about the risks, how would you design the explanatory flyer?

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- Which communication tools/methods would you use to communicate bad news?

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Internal Communication

- How would you develop a communication plan?

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- Which tools would you use to verify the reliability of the information?

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Problem Solving

- What are the risks, hazards, vulnerabilities? What additional resources will be necessary?

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- In order to manage a situation of great uncertainty and danger, which tools do you suggest to use?

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Decision Making

- What critical issues might be revealed by a need analysis?

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- What factors must you consider when selecting an alternative? What are the key decision points?

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Leadership

- What skills must a leader have in a situation of great uncertainty and danger?

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- In the role of psychological emergency facilitator, how can you protect and preserve your group?

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Team Building

- Which conflict management strategies can you use?

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- Which roles and tasks can you establish within your group?

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Team Caring

- In a situation that imposes levels of security not easy to maintain, what interventions can you consider for supporting your group?

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– In case of direct involvement of a team member, what kind of intervention can you consider?

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