



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

INTERNAL COMMUNIQUÉ

The UWI adds Psycho-Social experts to its COVID-19 Task Force

Recognising the science associated with post trauma stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic, The University of the West Indies (The UWI) has taken the additional step of establishing a special operational unit within its regional UWI COVID-19 Task Force.

The University notes that its students and staff are already showing evidence of extreme stress, driven by the radical, transformational and unprecedented actions within the teaching, learning and living culture of the institution. To provide support in addressing these concerns, experts in the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry have been added to the Task Force.

Commenting on the need for the expanded team, Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles stated, "This development is consistent with global best practice which shows that lasting and damaging consequences can be associated with such deep-rooted disruption that creates unimaginable insecurity in some. The mental aspects are as important as the material and social dimension."

The four new experts on the Task Force are Professor Wendel Abel, Professor of Mental Health Policy, Consultant Psychiatrist/Public Health, and Head of the Department of Community Health & Psychiatry at The UWI Mona Campus; Dr. Katija Khan, Clinical Psychologist and Lecturer in Clinical Psychology in the Department of Clinical Medical Sciences at The UWI St. Augustine Campus; Mrs. Ceceile Minott, trained Counsellor, Director of the Consortium for Social Development & Research at The UWI Open Campus and Head of its Caribbean Child Development Centre; and Professor Donna-Maria B. Maynard, Professor of Psychology, Clinical & Counselling Psychology and Registered Psychologist at The UWI Cave Hill Campus. Together they will function as a new Psycho-Social Unit within the Task Force, and will interact with campus management teams to help extend counselling services to students and staff, predominantly via distance counselling.

The unit will also have a major role to play in society to help bring calm and expert guidance to affected populations on ways to cope with the pandemic. Professor Clive Landis, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Chairman of the UWI COVID-19 Task Force noted, "We are witnessing a number of anxiety-related behaviours in our communities, which is only natural, but we must guard against negative reactions on an individual and on a societal level towards those who are sick or isolated by this disease." Emphasizing the wider regional community response, he said, "It is our sense of Caribbean solidarity and community that will get us through this."

The new Task Force members will also have visible roles in public discourse including an upcoming Vice-Chancellor's Forum scheduled for **Friday, March 20, 2020**. This third forum to be hosted since the COVID-19 risk emanated, is themed **Sickness, Science, and Sovereignty: Caribbean Unity or Plurality**. A panel of medical and social scientists will explore the implementation of various national policies across the region in dealing with the COVID-19 virus pandemic.

Two previous Vice-Chancellor's forums were held on January 30 and March 9 respectively, themed *Demystifying the Coronavirus (COVID-19)* and *Partnering in the Caribbean's Response*. These conversations are part of the regional University's response to the threat of COVID-19. Recorded broadcasts of these forums are available for viewing on UWItv's cable channels and website www.uwityv.org.

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