



Helping patients & caregivers stay connected during COVID-19

This section* will answer the following questions:

- [How can I stay connected? \(page 3\)](#)
- [How can I use a personal device to connect with people I care about? \(page 4\)](#)
- [How can I manage contact fatigue? \(page 7\)](#)
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*Access the other sections of [this workbook](http://michmed.org/ng2Wl) by visiting: <http://michmed.org/ng2Wl>



How to use this section

This workbook is for patients with COVID-19 and for anyone assisting in their care. This document refers to anyone who is providing care to someone during or after a hospital stay as a “caregiver.” This may be the first time you find yourself in a caregiving role, or you may have been a caregiver to this person (or others) for a long time.

Downloading and printing

Printing and downloading instructions may vary depending on the Internet browser you use. Below are example instructions.

1. On your computer, click on the link to the workbook section you wish to print. This will open the document as a tab in your web browser.
2. Hover your mouse over the document. Icons will appear in the top right corner. Click on the middle icon (the underlined arrow). This will download the document as a PDF onto your computer.
3. Open your file explorer, then navigate to your “Downloads” folder. Double-click on the document name. This will open the PDF in a PDF viewer, such as Adobe Acrobat.
4. In the top-left corner of the PDF viewer, select “File,” then “Print.” You can also print by pressing the “P” key while holding down Ctrl (on a PC) or ⌘ Command (on a Mac). Before printing, make sure you have selected the printer you want to use.

Increasing text size

On your computer, tablet, or phone, you can zoom in or zoom out to make text and images larger or smaller.

- **Zoom Buttons:** Depending on your browser or PDF viewer, there may be buttons to zoom in and out. Press or click the plus (+) button to zoom in.
- **Pinch to Zoom:** On a smartphone or tablet, touch the PDF with your finger, then zoom by pinching two fingers in or out.

Using hyperlinks

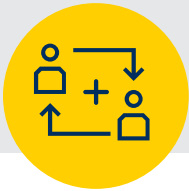
This workbook contains hyperlinks. On your computer, tablet, or phone, you can click on a hyperlink to take you to a specific website or online resource. A hyperlink can look like text: [Centers for Disease Control](#), or like a web address: <https://www.cdc.gov/>.

Using QR codes

This workbook contains **QR codes**: a type of “square barcode” that takes you to an online resource. Most phones now have built-in QR code readers or are compatible with free apps that can read QR codes. To use a QR code, open your camera app on your smartphone, hold your smartphone camera over the QR code, and click on the link that should appear on your screen.

Interactive table of contents

At the beginning of each section is a box that explains what questions the section answers. The questions are also hyperlinks. If you click on one of these hyperlinked questions, you can jump right to that section of the workbook.



How can I stay connected?

I can't be with the patient in the hospital, how can I stay in touch?

Michigan Medicine offers caregivers several strategies for keeping track of the patient and their records:

1. Emergency Department text messaging system
2. Online health records
3. Communicating with hospital staff (see section [“Communicating with your care team while in the hospital”](#): <http://michmed.org/ng2Wl>)
4. Patient and Visitor Michigan Medicine Help Line (800-888-9825)

When the patient is in the emergency department, remember that they will be receiving care but it may take awhile before information on their condition is available.

How do I access the Michigan Medicine text messaging system?

If you are unable to be in the hospital with the patient, you can still stay updated on the patient's progress. The Michigan Medicine texting system can provide you text updates regarding the patient while they are in the Emergency Department. You may need to contact the Emergency Department (734-936-6666) to receive these updates.

How do I access online health records?

If you are a patient

You can contact your care team and view your health records through the [MyUofM-Health Patient Portal](http://michmed.org/xoWYR) (<http://michmed.org/xoWYR>). Select “For myself only” to make an account for yourself, or select “Adult granting access to another adult” to give your caregiver access.

If you are a caregiver

With the patient's permission, you can also contact the care team and view the patient's health records. See the contact information below for help.



For questions or information about the MyUofMHealth Patient Portal:

Email: HIM-PatientPortal@med.umich.edu,

Phone: 734-615-0872 (Monday-Friday 7:00 am - 7:00 pm, Saturday and Sunday 8:00 am - 5:00 pm), or

Visit: <http://michmed.org/xoWYR> (or scan the QR code)



How can I use a personal device to connect with people I care about?

Note about cell phone service:

- Cell phone service is often poor in the Emergency Department
- If cell phone service is poor, try using the free hospital WiFi

To connect to free hospital WiFi:

- The wireless network is called "MGuest-UMHS."
- Enter the address of any Web site into the browser of your laptop or mobile device.
- A login page will load onto your device.
- Enter your last name and email address, and click "Accept."
- On the next page, click "Continue" and you will be directed to the Health Systems Website.
- You can explore our site, or go to any other Web site by typing in the address or using your own "bookmarks" list.
- To learn more about [accessing WiFi at Michigan Medicine](http://michmed.org/18mgd), ask a nurse or visit: <http://michmed.org/18mgd>
- To call the patient's room: Ask the hospital operator to connect you by calling 734-936-4000
- To call from a patient room: Dial 97 for an outside line or dial 0 to ask the hospital operator for assistance

There are also many [apps and websites](#) you can use to connect with friends and family through video, voice, or text. To learn more about these options, visit: <http://michmed.org/G24Jy>

Be on the lookout for...

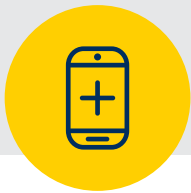
Video calls can be emotionally challenging

Video calls can be comforting, but they can also be emotionally difficult due to the possible physical and mental changes of the patients while they are in the hospital. Even if it might be difficult, some also find it helpful to understand the reality of what the patient is going through.

Strategies That Can Help

When deciding how to communicate, put the patient first.

- **Video** - ask the patient if it is okay
- **Calling** - this is sometimes preferred if the patient is worried about how they look and would feel more comfortable communicating via phone
- **Texting** - If the patient finds talking difficult, texting is a good method of communication



How can I use a personal device to connect with people I care about?

Common video chat apps on smartphones and devices:

If your personal device has a camera but does not have FaceTime or Google Duo, you can download one of the apps below to connect via video, voice or text:

Apple Devices



FaceTime

Android Devices



Google Duo



[Facebook Messenger
messenger.com](https://messenger.com)



[WhatsApp
whatsapp.com](https://whatsapp.com)



[Google Hangouts
hangouts.google.com](https://hangouts.google.com)



[Skype
skype.com](https://skype.com)



[Signal Messenger
signal.org](https://signal.org)



[Google Duo
duo.google.com](https://duo.google.com)

Above: Apps that may help you communicate with patients or caregivers while in the hospital. To [learn more about these options](http://michmed.org/G24Jy), visit: <http://michmed.org/G24Jy>

Remember, if you are in the hospital, you can connect to the free WiFi Internet called "MGuest-UMHS." To learn more about [accessing WiFi at Michigan Medicine](http://michmed.org/18mgd), ask a nurse or visit: <http://michmed.org/18mgd>

"And then a nurse said, 'Hey, you can do FaceTime with your wife on [your iPod Touch]' 'What's FaceTime?' Sure enough. Those nurses were angels. And, of course, they're like half my age, if not less than that, so they know all this stuff. It's something you should've filmed because this nurse in all her hazmat gear and everything is showing this 55 year old gentleman who's infected with COVID how to do FaceTime. It made my day."

- COVID-19 Patient, July 2020

**Patient and Visitor
Michigan Medicine Help Line
Phone: 800-888-9825**



How can I manage contact fatigue?

Be on the lookout for...

Contact fatigue, loneliness, and distress due to physical and mental changes

Although family and friends may mean well, sometimes their questions and phone calls can become overwhelming. This feeling is called “contact fatigue.”

At the same time, COVID-19 can cause a sense of isolation for both patients and their caregivers. Even if you feel overwhelmed by too much contact from family and friends, you can still feel lonely and isolated.

Patients can undergo both physical and mental changes during their hospital stay (due to weight loss, confusion, delirium, and presence of medical equipment). These changes can be hard for both the patient and the caregiver to see, especially if the patient and caregiver have been separated from each other.

Strategies that can help

- For emotional support related to COVID-19, you can call a warmline.
 - [Michigan Stay Well Counseling](#):
 - Free, confidential emotional support available 24/7
 - Call 1-888-535-6136 and press “8” or visit Michigan.gov/StayWell
 - Michigan Crisis Text Line:
 - Text the keyword **restore** to 741741
 - Find [your local warmlines](#) by visiting: <http://michmed.org/48mY4>
- Access the [COVID-19 Mental Health Toolkit](#): <http://michmed.org/Bvj9l>
- Read on for other strategies and resources for contact fatigue, isolation, and distress over physical changes



How can I manage contact fatigue?

You may feel stressed, irritated, or distracted by the number of calls and texts you receive from well-meaning friends and family. At the same time, you may also feel guilty that you cannot respond to everyone.

Here are some strategies that can help if you experience contact fatigue:

Set and communicate your boundaries

- Remember you can ask for what **you** need; you are not just a source of news
- Limit topics of conversation, frequency of contact, or time of day
- Schedule a time to interact with others and commit to a log-off time

Limit exposure

- Turn off alerts or limit use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter
- Don't respond to non-urgent texts, calls, or posts
- Use group texts and emails instead of individual texts and emails
- Commit to fewer updates only at certain times of day
- Pick a "point person" who will communicate news to family and friends for you

Picking a point person⁷

Ask a family member or friend to act as a point person. This person will take messages and provide updates to concerned family and friends so you only have to update one person.

Name: _____ **Phone Number(s):** _____

Email: _____

Notes: _____

Example of an update platform: CaringBridge

CaringBridge is an example of an online platform that can help with contact fatigue. You can use CaringBridge to post updates for selected family and friends, request help with specific things you need, and many other features. Download the free [CaringBridge app for Apple](http://myumi.ch/xmjno) (<http://myumi.ch/xmjno>) or free [CaringBridge app for Android](http://myumi.ch/Plonj) (<http://myumi.ch/Plonj>), or visit the [CaringBridge website: https://www.caringbridge.org/](https://www.caringbridge.org/)

Note: Michigan Medicine has no connection to CaringBridge and has not reviewed its services. This is intended as an example for informational purposes only, not an endorsement of CaringBridge services.

⁷ Adapted from: Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. Worksheet 1: Emergency Room (ER) Plan. In: Caregiver Workbook. 2019:1-3. https://www.lls.org/sites/default/files/National/USA/Pdf/Publications/Caregiver_Worksheet_1_ER_2019.pdf. Accessed November 11, 2020.



How can I manage loneliness and isolation?

You may feel lonely and isolated even if family and friends are reaching out to you. You aren't just a source of news, but have emotional needs, too. You need conversations that aren't just a "medical report."

Here are some strategies that can help you manage loneliness and isolation

- Recognize that what you are feeling is okay
- Communicate your needs and boundaries with the people who support you
- Maintain your mental and spiritual health
 - Prayer
 - Meditation
 - Self-reflection
 - Spend time with nature
 - Connect with people who renew your spirit
- Connect with professionals who can help
 - Social workers
 - Chaplains
 - Psychotherapy or psychiatry services
- Explore the [COVID-19 Mental Health Toolkit: http://michmed.org/AO49j](http://michmed.org/AO49j)
- As a caregiver, prioritize self-care
 - Keep a regular sleep, diet, and exercise schedule
 - Spend 5 minutes of your day doing something you enjoy
 - Read a book
 - Listen to music
 - Enjoy a hobby
 - Connect with a friend

"I had to make certain decisions. And it was a very lonely, isolated feeling [...] When you do have a spouse or significant other that you make these decisions and all of a sudden you find yourself, overnight, alone."

**- COVID-19 Caregiver,
December 2020**

Talk with peers going through the same experience:

- **Join an online support group.**
There are online communities for COVID-19 where people can connect about their experiences. For more information, go to section [Appendix A: Building Your Support Group \(http://michmed.org/ng2Wl\)](http://michmed.org/ng2Wl).
- **Seek peer support.**
Michigan Medicine's Office of Patient Experience can connect you with people who were also COVID-19 patients or caregivers. These are people who understand the journey and have volunteered to help others. To ask about peer support, email: patient-experience@med.umich.edu



Share feedback on this document

<http://michmed.org/v1Xlo>

This Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement effort was reviewed under IRB-Med #HUM00190878 and determined not to require IRB approval (Not Regulated - non-research).

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

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(<https://heart.isr.umich.edu/meet-our-research-team/>)

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