

Ballarat COVID-19, No. 3, 21 April 2020

Being Sick In This Time – But Not With The Virus

Despite having no signs of COVID-19 at all I have been occupying the attention of doctors and associated health professionals recently. It would be self-indulgent to go through all of these appointments, as well as tedious, but a couple of them show how the virus has, temporarily at least, affected the delivery of health services.

I have now had two telehealth sessions with my psychologist and a third is due soon. On the dot of the appointment time the psychologist rings me; we conclude the session after the typical one hour of a counselling session has passed. The measures taken against COVID-19's spread offer some benefits via telehealth. I can wander around my study while cradling the phone and, as I am not doing the appointment via Zoom, I really don't have to shave, get out of pyjamas or clean the place up. That slovenliness doesn't occur though. I, and everything else, is spick and span. And this is because when I was doing rehab in pre-COVID, pre-Ballarat days my then counsellor remarked on my (apparently) neat appearance. She added that she and her colleagues took note of their clients' standard of dress and hygiene. To be 'well groomed' was seen as a sign of personal care and attention to social norms – positive indicators, signs of progress. ('Grooming' might have been abandoned as a go to term for psychologists for obvious reasons.) So, even if my current counsellor cannot see me in the flesh as it were, they may rest assured that I am showered and neatly, if casually, dressed.

The other great advantage of the telehealth session, possibly unexpected by many practitioners and participants, is that 'social static' is much reduced. Despite the fact that I am surrounded by books, the computer screen, pictures and close to the kitchen, I am on task after the briefest of introductions and we get through more of my fascinating symptoms and life story than we do face to face. My psychologist is as chatty as I am so perhaps we are an unfortunate combination in some ways. But I am still looking forward to going back to the personal sessions, if only to establish normalcy in another aspect of our lives.

So, yesterday I did have a face to face session with my general practitioner, one of the few in their practice still doing it 'live.' There was social static at the start and when I asked how

they were getting on with their job and school-age children they started crying. That's another story for another time.

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