

# PSPs: The Medical Perspective

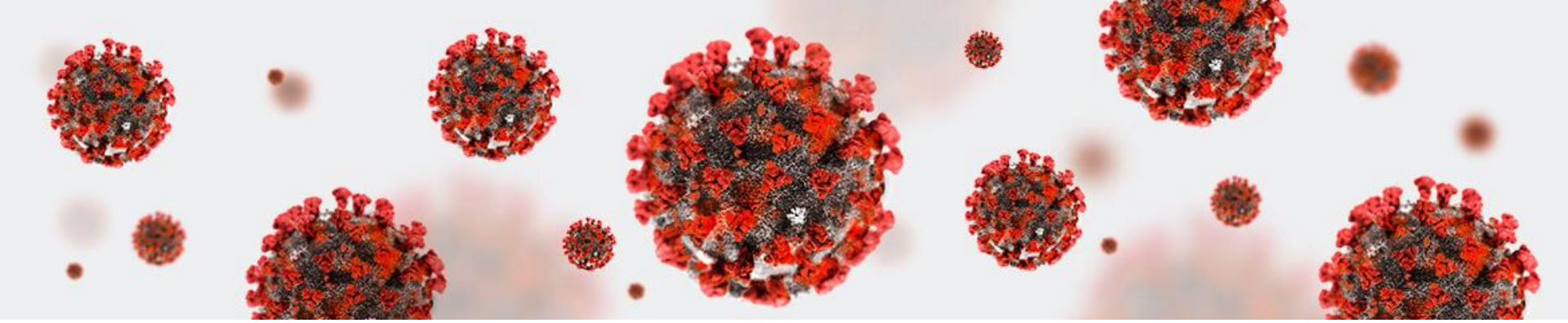


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Member Founding Board EPPSI

Advisory Board ESAM

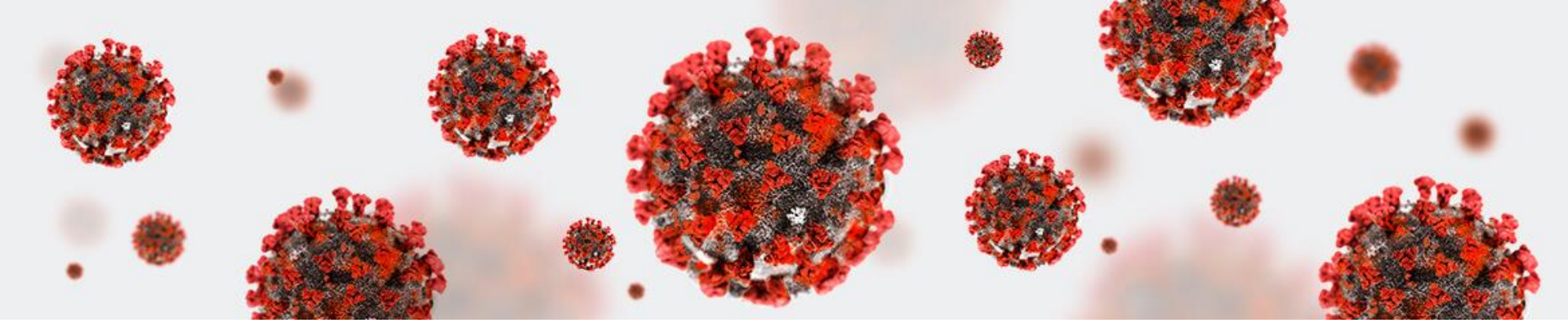
Senior Medical Advisor TNO



# The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Outbreak and Mental Health Current Risks and Recommended Actions

JAMA Psychiatry Published online June 24, 2020

‘this outbreak presents substantial risk for widespread  
mental health problems and psychological fear-related  
responses’

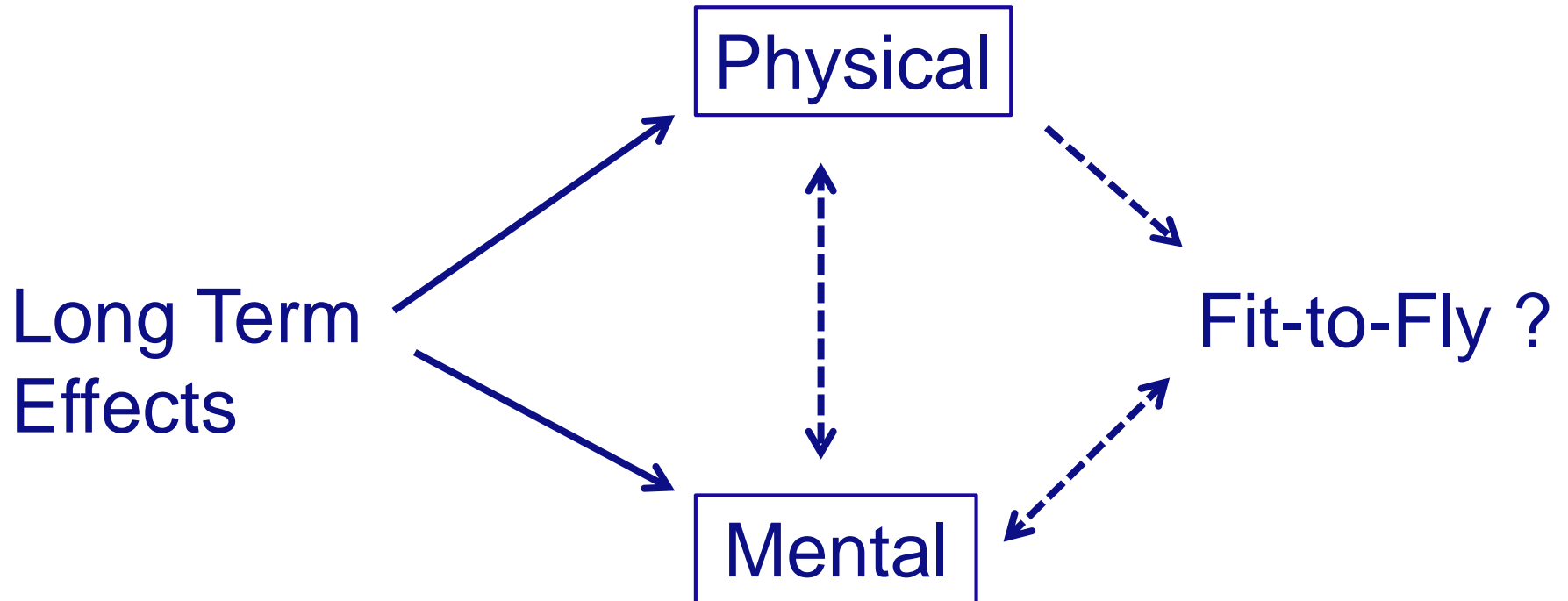
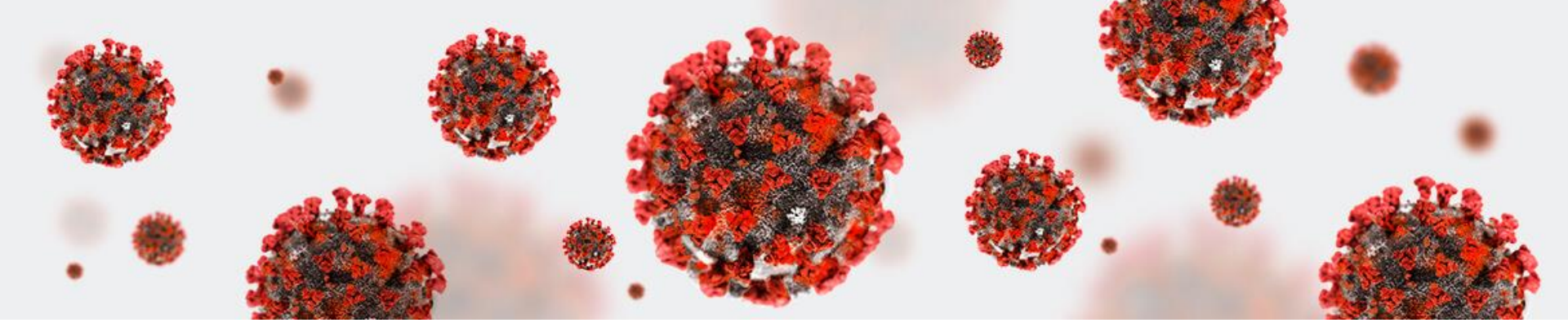


# Suicide Mortality and Coronavirus Disease 2019— A Perfect Storm?

JAMA Psychiatry Published online April 10, 2020

‘Secondary consequences of social distancing may increase the risk of suicide.

It is important to consider changes in a variety of economic, psychosocial, and health-associated risk factors’



# Reduced performance of staff and increased risk in the system

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- Fear
- Uncertainty about the situation and future
- Increased stress
- Increased pressures
- Distraction
- Fatigue
- Psychological reasons
- Physiological reasons

## Life stress that can form part of any pilot's "carry on luggage"

- work related problems
- financial worries
- health concerns
- bereavement issues
- relationship / family difficulties
- separation from family
- social demands

May lead to impaired performance and to significant mental health problems in some cases

[e.g. Hammen, 2005; Young, 2008]

The COVID-19 pandemic may be the trigger for mental health problems to emerge



# Mental Health Stigma and Unawareness

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- Pilots are reluctant to report Mental / Emotional Issues to AMEs
- Pilots are reluctant to tell colleagues about their problems or seek help



Pilots are often unaware about the impact of their problems  
on professional performance and health

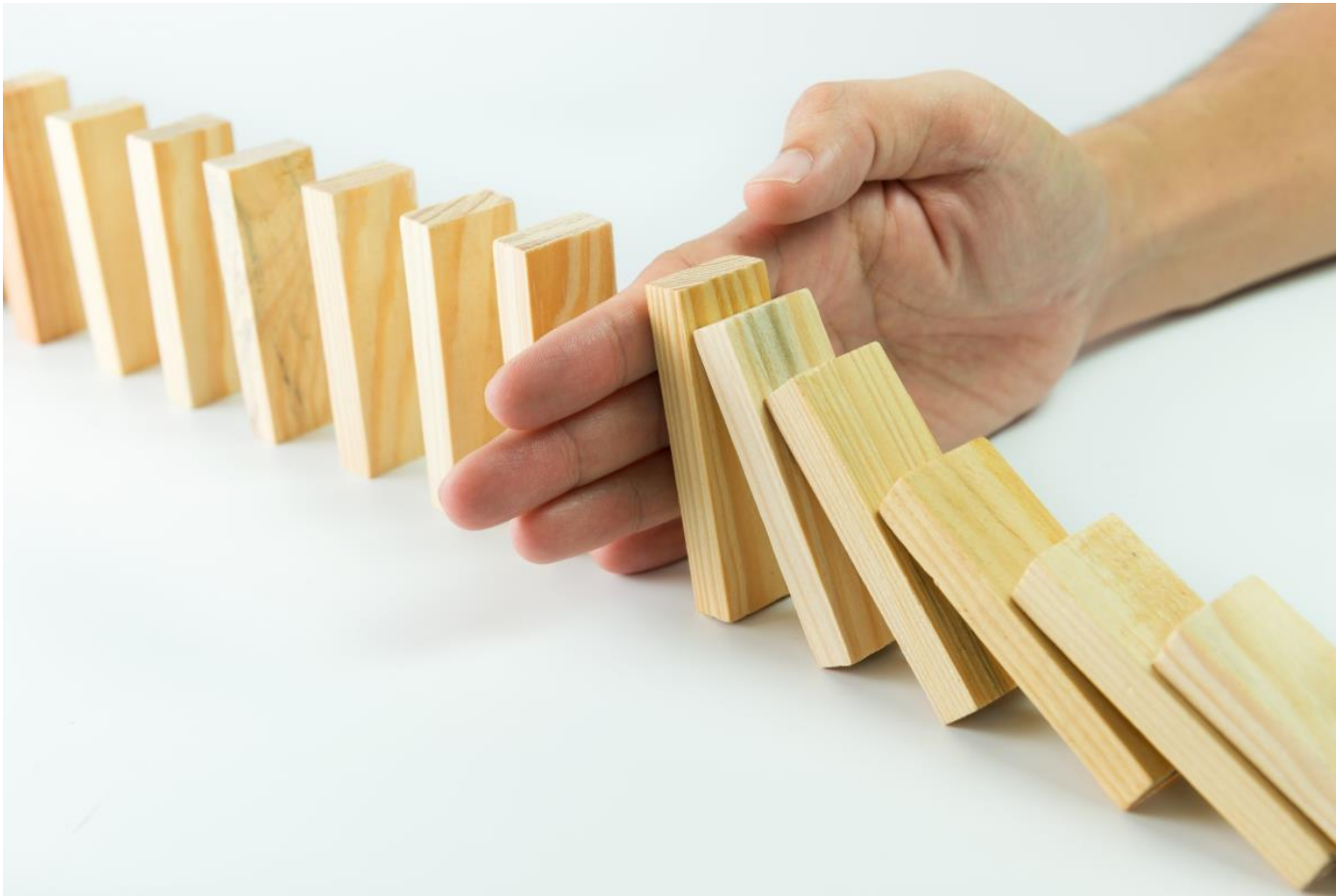




# The Medical Perspective

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PPSP can help to prevent performance impairment and escalation of mental health problems



# Key objectives for a PPSP

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1. To make it as easy as possible for pilots to have a conversation about issues which could potentially affect their safe professional performance
2. To direct the pilot effectively towards appropriate help



Some AMEs/Medical Assessors are worried that PPSPs would facilitate pilots to hide significant medical problems for AMEs . . . . .



# APPLICATION FORM FOR AN AVIATION MEDICAL CERTIFICATE

Complete this page fully and in block capitals - Refer to instructions pages for details.

	YES	NO
118 Psychological trouble of any sort		X
119 Alcohol/drug/substance abuse		X
120 Attempted Suicide		X

(31) Declaration: I hereby declare that I have carefully considered the statements made above and to the best of my belief they are complete and correct and that I have not withheld any relevant information or made any misleading statements. I understand that if I have made any false or misleading statements in connection with this application, or fail to release the supporting medical information, the Licensing Authority may refuse to grant me a medical certificate or may withdraw any medical certificate granted.

The decision to take the first step in opening up about mental health issues will always be a voluntary choice by the pilot . . .



The whole point of PPSPs is making that step as easy and safe as possible

# PSP: Benefit for Flight Safety

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1. Identification of thus far hidden problems that might be significant for flight safety
2. Improved prevention of performance impairment and disqualifying mental health problems



Crew members with psychological problems:  
20% need professional support



The 'medical' route: MHP keeps an oversight of the initial  
referral via the Peer



The pilot self-refers to the relevant medical/psychological care,  
while the MHP will guide this process in the right direction.



- The MHP makes the judgement about a pilot's fitness to fly or what constitutes a threat to flight safety in conjunction with the consulting AME or company medical person.
- The only bodies able to remove a pilot from the roster for medical reasons: the operator's medical department; the pilot's AME; or the NAA.

Pilot's name and case protected by medical confidentiality,  
Flight Ops will be informed that the pilot is 'sick'. No details.

# Confidentiality is Key Element for PPSPs

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- Confidential information should not be available for operator's management, NAAs, colleague pilots, family, spouses, clergy, judiciary



# Breaching confidentiality

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Breaching confidentiality: If the MHP determines that there is a threat to flight safety, and the pilot refuses to self-report to operational and medical authority.



Every effort shall be made to get consent of the pilot

FO – age 33 yrs  
Interview by AME

- **Employment insecurity**
- **Uncertain about future**
- **Poor appetite and poor sleep**
- **Less interest or pleasure in most activities**

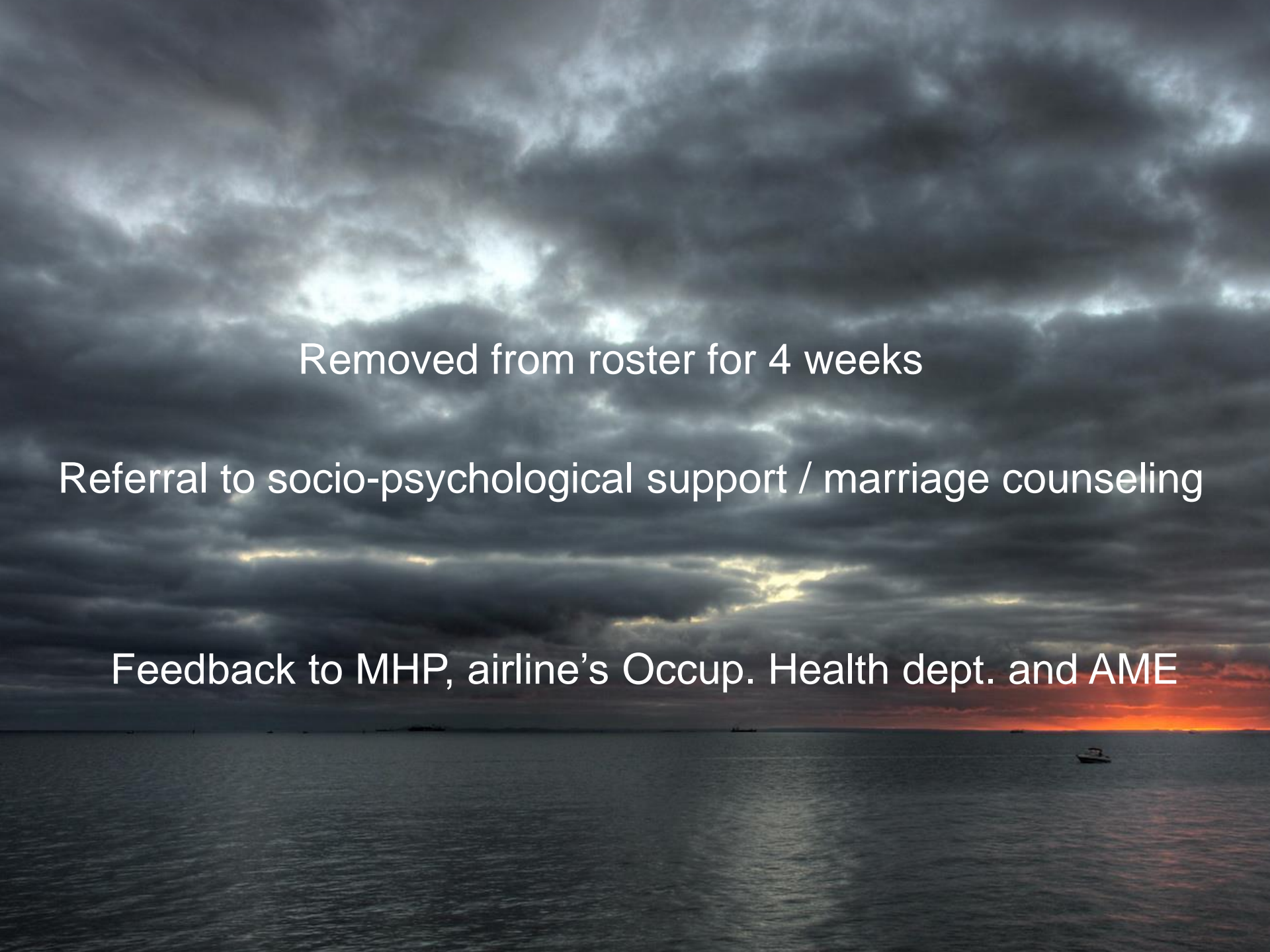


A silhouette of a person, likely a woman, is shown in a distressed pose. She is leaning forward with her head buried in her hands, suggesting deep thought, worry, or despair. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue, possibly representing a sky or a wall. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

FO – age 33 yrs  
Self-referral to PSP via AME

- Employment insecurity
- Uncertain about future
- Marital problems emerging during lock-down
- Difficulty to concentrate



The background image is a seascape at sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, with a bright orange and yellow glow from the sun low on the horizon. The water is dark and calm, reflecting the light from the sky. A small boat is visible on the right side of the horizon.

Removed from roster for 4 weeks

Referral to socio-psychological support / marriage counseling

Feedback to MHP, airline's Occup. Health dept. and AME

Captain 52 yrs

Colleague raised concern . . . .

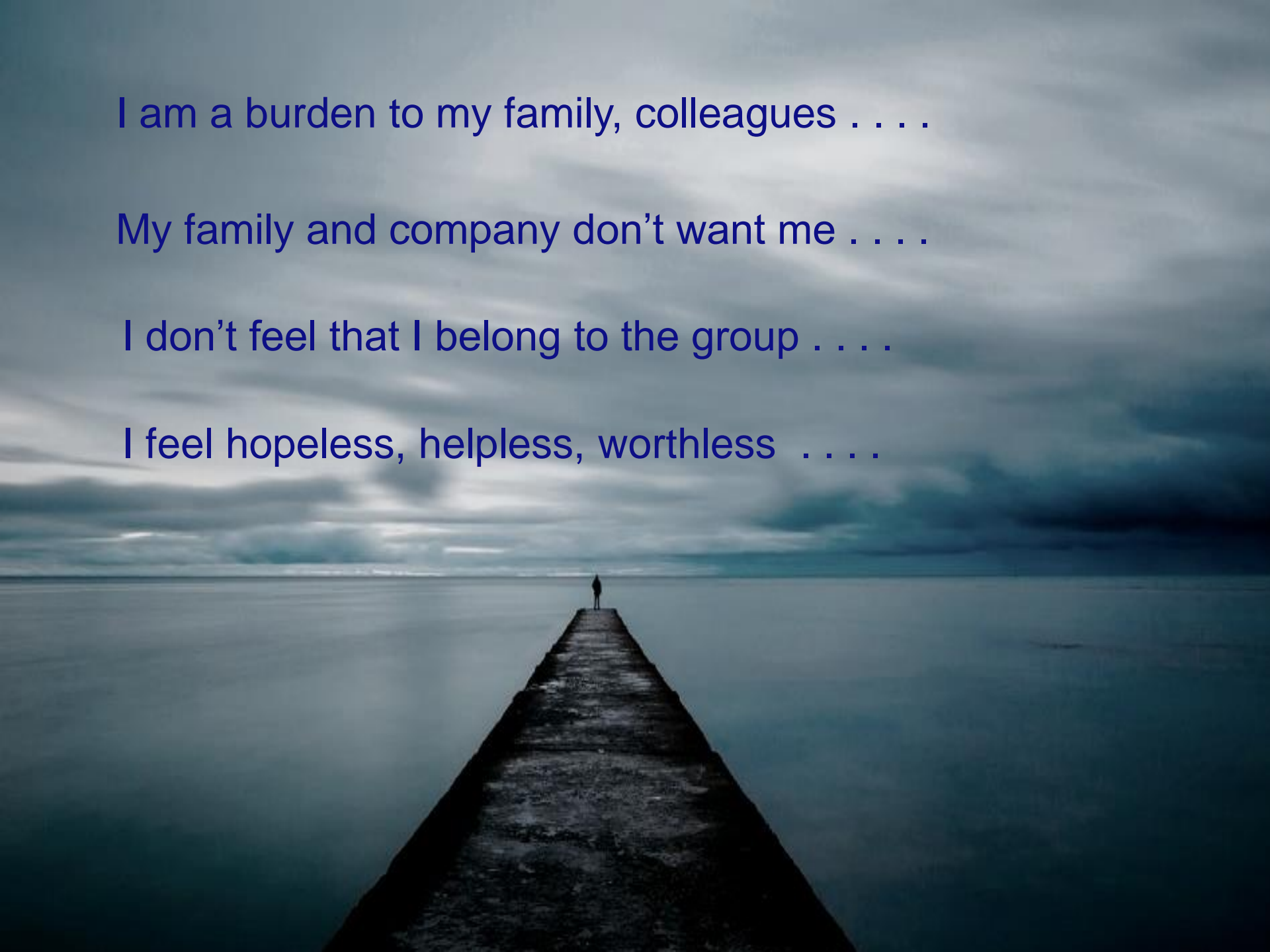


I am a burden to my family, colleagues . . . .

My family and company don't want me . . . .

I don't feel that I belong to the group . . . .

I feel hopeless, helpless, worthless . . . .



Removed from roster – Unfit

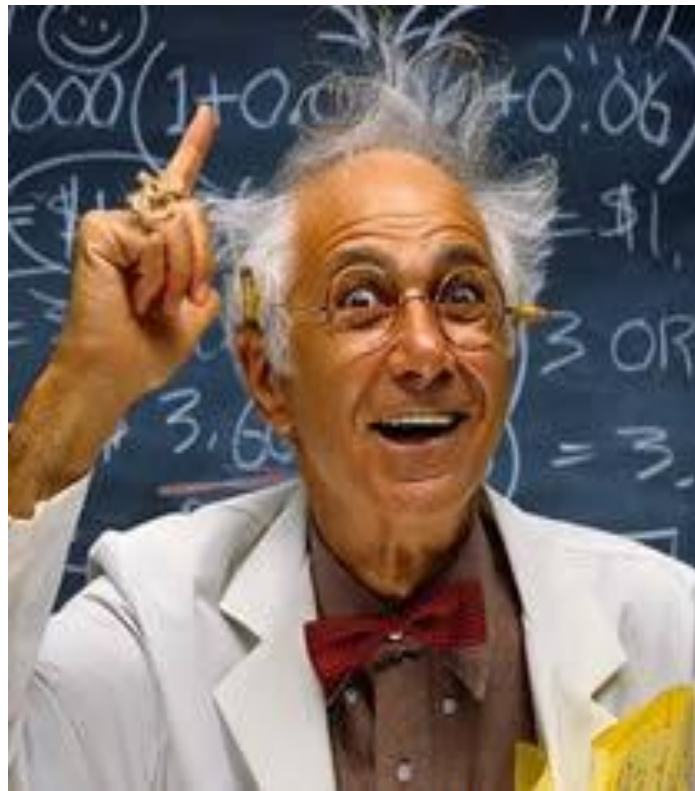
Referral to Psychiatrist

Feed-back to MHP, AME, Occup. Health dept





AMEs should be trained to know the key–principles and  
the aims of the local PPSP(s)  
and fully utilize their opportunities



# Aeromedical Examiners

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AMEs and other health care professionals should proactively discuss work-related challenges due to COVID-19, with those seeking their services.



Pathways should be highlighted for access to Peer Support Programs and/or specialist mental health support.



More information?

[www.eppsi.eu](http://www.eppsi.eu)



Pilot Peer Support  
Programmes

The EPPSI Guide

Vol 1: Design and Implementation

v.8.1 November 2019

