

Student Support and Wellbeing
Corona virus: FAQs
30 March 2020

Where are services located?

All the services listed on the Graduate Institute web page dedicated to [Student Wellbeing](#) are continuing as usual. As a reminder, these include:

- Staff members of the Graduate Institute's Student Support and Wellbeing Service (SSWS), via a dedicated e-mail address: **student.support@graduateinstitute.ch**
- Independent psychologists working with the students of the Graduate Institute
- Access to the health centre at the University of Geneva (*Pôle Santé Sociale*, or PSS)
- [Student consultation centre](#) of the Geneva university hospital (HUG), providing both medical and mental health services. Telephone consultations are now also available: you can indicate this when you book the appointment.
- Emergency and regular psychiatric unit of the Geneva University Hospital (HUG). Dial **022 372 38 62** 24/7
- The Geneva COVID-19 hotline now offers emotional and psychological support staffed by professionals. Dial **0800 909 400** from 09:00 to 21:00. English language service is limited.
- *La main tendue* emergency psychological support, 24/7: dial **143**

The Pôle Santé Sociale at the University of Geneva confirmed 27 March 2020 that their psychological support services continue throughout the corona crisis, with increased online services.

Should new information become available about a modification to the availability of these services, we will share it using the usual communication channels (web page, message to the GISA Welfare Committee etc.).

Contact details are available from [this page](#).

Support for students who have left Geneva

If you are already receiving care from a Geneva-based professional (for example, a therapist), please check whether it is possible to continue the treatment online or by telephone.

If it is not, or if you need to initiate new treatment or a new support relationship, we encourage you to explore local options. This may be logistically easier. Do check with your health insurance to see whether it will reimburse such care, and how to proceed.

What is the cost of paid sessions?

- Staff of the SWSS continue to be available to students free of charge.
- The psychologists employed by the Graduate Institute continue to provide up to two guidance sessions to students free of charge. Between one and three additional follow-up sessions may be offered during the corona virus crisis, on an as-needed basis, determined by the psychologists.
- During the corona virus crisis, PSS is offering its sessions for free.
- Independent healthcare professionals in Geneva and in your home country charge according to current local regulations and practices. In Geneva, be sure to check reimbursement modalities. Most basic health insurance packages reimburse psychological consultations only if they are billed through a psychiatrist (doctor), as in the frequent arrangement of several psychologists working in one centre run by a psychiatrist, or psychiatrists who also work as therapists.
- Care provided at the Geneva university hospital, including its student consultation centre and its psychiatric unit, will always be reimbursed by all basic health insurance packages.

What is the difference between meeting with the psychologist for the 45-minute 'orientation session', meeting with Pole Sante Sociale, and meeting with a counsellor from student welfare?

- All the staff members of the Graduate Institute's SSWS are experienced in serving international students. We are often the first respondents to our students, who may already know us in our day-to-day administrative positions at the Institute. We are not qualified healthcare professionals and have received minimal basic training in this area. Our role is, primarily, to provide empathetic listening, evaluate the gravity and needs of the individual situation, and provide first-line support. This may take the form of practical advice, helping students identify resources within their immediate reach, information about additional resources in the local community, and/or referral to professional care. The SWSS team works under the supervision of the Institute's Executive Director for Human Resources.
- The psychologists working for the Graduate institute are experienced, fully qualified and licensed mental health professionals. Their role is to assess the student's needs professionally, provide support, and, if necessary, direct her/him to the most appropriate resource in the local community. They do not take on clients for therapy.
- The psychologists and counsellors working at PSS form a diverse team composed of seasoned supervisors and more junior healthcare professionals, as well as a medical doctor and social workers. All are fully qualified and licensed. Their role is also to assess needs and direct the student to further resources. In some cases, they may provide counselling or therapy in a classic therapeutic model.

What type of problems should students take to either person?

The different echelons of the services available to our students operate in a complementary/networked and progressive model:

- SSWS staff can provide a first response. We can also help with frequent problems related to international student life (culture shock, exam stress, social integration...) when there is no need for mental or medical healthcare.
- The Institute's psychologists offer a professional mental health assessment. They can provide tools that students can use on their own. They decide whether to refer the student to professional services in the Geneva community (therapists, doctors, etc.).
- The PSS can draw on the diverse competencies of its own team, offer medium or long-term therapy, and/or refer to additional resources.
- Cases that require medication must be referred to a psychiatrist (medical doctor specialised in psychiatric medicine), though ongoing therapy can continue with a psychologist.
- Emergency cases where an individual presents a vital threat either to her/himself (for example, suicidal plans) and/or to others (for example, violence) must be referred to emergency services or directly to the psychiatric unit at the hospital. In addition to its regular emergency service, the Geneva university hospital (HUG) also has a specialised psychiatric emergency service.

Students are concerned that their cultural background will not align with the psychologist/counsellor

This is a reality for all international students, the world over. It is part and parcel of the experience of leaving one's own culture to live elsewhere. There are bound to be differences between your home and host culture, in everything ranging from food to mental health approaches. Healthcare professionals in each country are trained and qualified according to their local curricula, licensing practices and legal provisions.

The extent to which culture differences hinder the therapeutic process will depend on your personality, flexibility and the nature of the concern or problem that you experience. Similarly, it will depend on your respondent's cultural awareness, flexibility, personality and cross-cultural skillset.

Keep in mind that while approaches differ from country to country, most underlying pathologies are not culturally dependent. In other words, if an individual suffers from a mental disorder or illness, this will be the case regardless of their culture of origin and of where they live. At the same time, the expatriation experience itself is challenging and subjective; it can bring to the fore underlying issues in an unexpected way. This is not a weakness nor a failure. Many physical illnesses, too, can become exacerbated by environmental factors.

If this aspect of the issue that you are experiencing becomes insurmountable, we strongly advise you to seek help from a professional who shares your cultural orientation, or even from a professional back home.

Further training in cross-cultural communication can improve the quality of your experience, but only after you receive the care you require for your most pressing problem.

What are the legal aspects of consulting a psychologist/counsellor - how confidential is it? What does 'confidential' mean in Switzerland? For example, in some places a psychologist must immediately report if a student admits suicidal ideation or thoughts, drug abuse, sexual assault. In other places not so.

In Switzerland, different regulations apply to adults (our students are all 18 or older) than to minors.

The scope of these FAQs is too limited to provide a discussion of Swiss law. Swiss legislation provides strong protection of personal data, in particular (but not only) within the relationship between a patient and his/her carers, be they doctors, psychologists/counsellors, social workers etc. Patient information that contains personal data cannot be disclosed without consent.

The staff of the Institute's SSWS are student service professionals, not healthcare professionals. Our profession too is subject to laws and regulations limiting disclosure of personal data. However, given the sensitive nature of our role within SSWS, we will consult with our supervisor if we have a concern about the welfare of one of our students. We may also share information within our team in order to work effectively as a network (for example, housing/rents and financial aid).

Finally, Swiss law puts a person's life before her/his privacy, in the sense that if a student appears to present a threat to his/her own life or to the physical safety of others, the local emergency services must be alerted (police, ambulance or, to a lesser extent, fire department). Failing to do so is a criminal offense (non-assistance to a person in danger).