Newsroom

🏠 / News / 2020 / April / 'Coronaphobia' Tests Developed at CNU Now Used Worldwide

'Coronaphobia' Tests Developed at CNU Now Used Worldwide

Psychology Professor Sherman Lee leads team that pioneered screening tools.

by Jim Hanchett | April 30, 2020

Above: Sherman Lee

Read time: about 1 min

A research team led by psychology Professor Sherman Lee, with assistance from Christopher Newport students, has developed what are believed to be among the first medical screening tools for coronavirus anxiety. They are being used worldwide by doctors, nurses and scientists.

The two mental health tests help health care workers screen people who may be at risk for psychiatric conditions specifically connected to the pandemic, what scholars have named "coronaphobia." They were launched after Lee and three students studied the psychology of 775 people who were anxious and feared the coronavirus.

The Coronavirus Anxiety Scale asks participants whether they've experienced symptoms such as dizziness, sleeplessness and nausea or lost interest in eating and felt paralyzed.

A second test, the Obsession with COVID-19 Scale, assesses persistent and disturbed thinking with symptoms such as dreams and nonstop thoughts about the virus. Responses on both tests are measured on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 4 (felt every day for two weeks).

Lee said he started developing the screening tools in February and believes he was among the first U.S. scientists to

investigate the mental health aspects of the virus. "I anticipated that the COVID-19 epidemic could cause a potential mental health crisis around the world and that the negative effects of this infectious disease outbreak may be greater and longer lasting than its physical toll," he said.

> "My hope is that my students and I can continue to lead the fight against the negative mental health effects of this global crisis through our ongoing research, consultation and development of highly effective instruments."

The screening tools have already been translated to 17 languages. Dozens of health professionals and researchers are deploying them with populations around the world, including Syrian refugees in Turkey, medical patients in Indonesia and the people of the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma. The research is also included in a highly regarded collection maintained by Cambridge University in London.

Lee leads a research team that includes Dr. Jeffrey Gibbons of Christopher Newport, and Dr. Evgenia Milman of St. Edward's University and Dr. Robert Niemeyer of the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition.

Lee has also been assisted in his research by two undergraduates. Mary Jobe, '20, and Amanda Mathis, '20, co-authored four research articles with Lee that have been or soon will be published. A third student, Emily Pappalardo, '23, has recently joined the team. "These students are obviously high performing students who have dedicated their free time to learn and work with me closely so we can make a real difference in the world," Lee said.

Lee is an associate professor of psychology at Christopher Newport. He studies negative feeling states, such as anxiety and grief, and the role personality and religion play in those emotional experiences. He teaches courses in the psychology of personality; psychology of the human-animal bond; and the psychology of death, dying and bereavement.