

8-8-2020

## Post-grad student volunteers first port of call for Covid patients

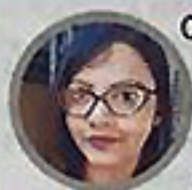
**Tamaghna Banerjee**  
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**Kolkata:** A group of post-graduate students and recent pass-outs have been roped in by the state in its corona battle. These volunteers have joined the state health department as tele-medicine counsellors from this week and their job includes boosting the morale of Covid patients, understanding their psyche and helping them stay positive. They may also meet Covid survivors at the time of their discharge from hospitals and prepare them for the road ahead.

So far, 26 post-graduate students of clinical psychology, applied psychology and journalism and mass communication department of Calcutta University — all in their early and mid-twenties — have joined the government's "tele psychological counselling department" on a two-month contract for a stipend of Rs 13,000 per month. Till Thursday 3,875 people had been counselled. Sources said more students are likely to be inducted in the next few days and the contract may be extended.

"Like the 'Covid Warrior' team, we have formed this 'Covid Helping Hand' team.

### LENDING AN EAR



On most occasions, I end up counselling the entire family after starting a conversation with a patient. The situation is

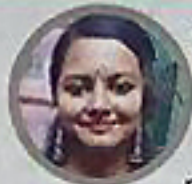
worse in villages

**Shreyashi Chakraborty**



I have worked with patients at Pavlov. But dealing with patients over phone with barely 2-3 minutes to build a rapport is extremely challenging

**Oindrila Paul**

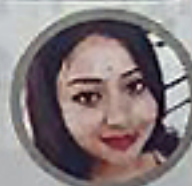


Several patients are saying they are facing rejection from their own family. We are advising them to keep feeling positive as the more they stay happy, the quicker they will heal

**Susama Dam**

It's an honour to be able to serve the nation in this hour of crisis. At the same time, the opportunity has enabled me to deal with real-life situations professionally for the first time

**Payel Sarkar**



**State health dept helpline | 1800313444222 (toll free) and 033-23412600**

**Telemedicine service | 033-23576001**



Apart from counselling, they are assisting the doctors in providing tele-medicine to the patients. They are attending the calls and then transferring them to the doctors according to the requirement," Mamata Banerjee said in a press conference at Nabanna on Thursday. The chief minister also asked the officials to develop a mechanism so that more youngsters could join the programme.

Last month, the state had approached Calcutta Univer-

sity for names of students. After a telephonic interview, the short-listed people were asked to join the service, said Sanjukta Das, a senior professor of the psychology department who specializes in clinical psychology, adult development and ageing.

The youths are handed a sheet of Covid-positive patients and their job includes calling them, checking up on their mental well being and helping them out if they are under stress. If required, the

volunteers can also get them connected to a doctor. The counsellors said that on speaking to scores of patients over the last two days, they have realized most patients are suffering from dejection and rejection, which are taking a toll on their mental health. The counsellors are thus trying to boost the patients' morale by giving them data of recovery rates.

"We are advising them to stay positive, which will ensure they heal quicker," said Susama Dam, a volunteer.