



NEWSLETTER

Spring 2002

The Common Cold of Mental Illness

An estimated one in five Americans will be affected by some form of depression disorder during the course of their lifetimes. Depression can afflict anyone, regardless of age, race, class or gender, and it is sometimes referred to as the common cold of mental illness. Although recovery from major depression is common, so is a recurrence of the disorder. Nearly two-thirds of the people experience a recurrence and each recurrence increases the risk for subsequent episodes.

One consequence of depression is the loss of self-confidence, the person often withdraws into themselves, and away from normal activities. Depression can leave family and friends feeling completely powerless to help. It is difficult to know what to say to someone who is depressed because they may interpret everything in a very pessimistic way. It can be difficult to know what they want because often they themselves do not know. They may be withdrawn and irritable but at the same time unable to reach out. They may be worried, but unwilling or unable to accept advice. Because of these difficulties, many depressed people tend to lose contact with friends and family members. The negative images in the media do little to further the cause of people with depression.

Seriously depressed people may need help taking care of themselves properly. They may neglect themselves by not eating or drinking. And talk of harming themselves should be taken seriously. Depression is estimated to contribute to 60% of all suicides. In one study depression was the major factor in overdose among adolescents, and suicide in the elderly is the third leading cause of injury related death.

Treatment for people with depression includes psychotherapy, antidepressants, or both. Regular exercise may reduce mild to moderate depression and, in many cases, may be as effective as psychotherapy or even antidepressants. Studies indicate that people with a strong spiritual faith, not necessarily in an organized religion, may be at lower risk for this illness. A strong network of social support is important for both prevention and recovery from depression. If you believe you are experiencing symptoms of depression, don't hesitate to discuss them with your doctor. There is help available. People with depression are not weak willed, but are suffering, as we all do from time to time, from a physical illness.

EMPLOYMENT WORKS!

For most of us, working provides a sense of purpose and a source of dignity. Unfortunately, the unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities is about 75% and for people with psychiatric disabilities it's even higher—between 80 and 90%. The obstacles to getting and keeping a job include fear of losing health care insurance, stigma and discrimination at the job site, lack of housing and low self-confidence.

Options for Southern Oregon, in collaboration with the Josephine County Mental Health Department, operates a supported employment program called Employment Works. People eligible for the program must be at least 18 years old, have a mental illness, receive services from JCMHD and have a stated interest in competitive employment.

The principles of this new program are: (1) vocational rehabilitation is an integral component of mental health treatment, (2) all clients can obtain competitive employment in community-based work settings, (3) people with psychiatric disabilities can find jobs rapidly rather than relying on lengthy prevocational assessments and/or training, (4) assessment of vocational needs is based on real work experiences and is continuous, (5) follow-along supports from the mental health treatment team are available on an ongoing basis for as long as necessary and (6) services are based on the prospective employee's preferences and choices.

We have seen amazing success with this program. During its first two years of operation, Employment Works has contacted 432 employers and assisted 66 people with psychiatric disabilities in obtaining competitive employment. Participants are working from five to forty hours a week. In addition, 15 people have been in volunteer positions, and 13 people have been enrolled in GED or AA programs through Rogue Community College. The range of employers includes Herb Pharm, Oil House, Riverside Convention Center, Redwood Towers, Sting Rays, Hugo Hills, The Daily Courier, Mac's Creations, Master Brand Cabinets and the YMCA.

We thank everyone who has worked so hard to make this program a success, and look forward to growing numbers of people returning to the world of work as respected members of our community.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR....

Spring has sprung and we're very pleased! Our quarterly numbers are in and indicate great success with our case management program. In-patient hospital and crisis respite usage has been reduced from 131 to 33 bed days per month in the first six months that we've been using this strengths-based model. Our case managers can really be proud.

More good news: Options has just completed Westview Commons, an 18-unit village complex in Roseburg. Comprised of five separate buildings surrounding a common area, this affordable housing project has a beautiful view of Roseburg's western hills. Funded by HUD, Oregon's Housing and Community Services Division and Douglas County Mental Health, Westview will be managed by Options, and clinical services will be provided by the county mental health program. The public is welcome to an Open House and tour of the new facility on May 9th from 2:00 to 4:00 pm at 1067 West Lookingglass Road. With its village-like setting, this is the most outstanding of our six current projects.

Here at our G Street facility our new multipurpose room, which is available to other community organizations, has been getting some good use. Several trainings, seminars and workshops have recently been held, and the Options staff is in the process of painting the old New Hope Bakery kitchen to make it easier to have food available for future meetings.

And finally, you'll note that this newsletter's feature article is about depression. As you may know, mental illness has long been viewed with intolerance, misunderstanding, avoidance or apathy. For many years, those with mental disorders have been perceived as intellectually impaired, and the media has portrayed them as compulsively reckless. If we can begin to change the public perception of this illness, we will be able to encourage many more people to seek medical care and eventual reintegration into the community, transforming them from consumers of mental health services into productive tax payers. Options' goal is to focus on recovery so that people can regain control of their lives rather than foster long-term unnecessary dependence on the mental health system.

Did You Know?

These people have experienced schizophrenia, manic depression and/or major depression.

Abraham Lincoln, Virginia Woolf, Eugene O'Neill, Beethoven, Leo Tolstoy, John Keats, Tennessee Williams, Vincent Van Gogh, Isaac Newton, Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath, Michelangelo, Winston Churchill, Charles Dickens . . . and many,

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