



Our view: Stigma keeps more than half with disorders from seeking help

We must talk about mental-health problems; learn basics about how to help

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Of the nearly 60 million adults in the U.S. who experience a mental disorder in any one year, only about 24 million will seek treatment. For some, the stigma and shame surrounding mental illness is so strong it keeps them from reaching out for help.

The only way to break that burden is to talk about mental illness openly, to demystify it. Learning about mental disorders and serious mental illnesses is crucial to identifying warning signs in ourselves or people we know. It also is necessary even if no one in our own lives is affected by mental illness, at this time and as far as we know.

Think of it this way: You may never have had cancer, and you may not know anyone who has had cancer. But you know about cancer in general, the basics of what it is, how it affects individuals and their families, some treatments and what to expect as the disease progresses.

We need the same literacy about mental illness.

The Community Partnership of Southern Arizona, which oversees the public mental-health system in Pima County, offers an excellent way to not only learn about mental health but to be in a position to offer basic help to someone who's in crisis. CPSA has partnered with the Arizona Department of Health Services/Division of Behavioral Health Services and the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare.

Since February, CPSA has put on 14 training sessions. Through these 12-hour training sessions, 286 people have become certified "Mental Health First Aid-ers." The training is free and open to the public.

Participants learn about types of mental disorders - such as depression, anxiety, psychosis, substance use, eating disorders -as well as how and when to approach a person who appears to be having a mental-health difficulty. They learn how to assess for risk of suicide or harm and techniques for talking with someone in crisis.

The goal isn't to turn everyone into mental-health experts, but rather to give them basic skills and knowledge to be a first responder who can assess, but not diagnose, a situation until the person in need can be safely handed off to professionals with more expertise.

Mental Health First Aid training provides practical pointers - for example, don't say "I understand exactly what you're going through" to someone in a mental-health crisis. Although you're trying to be empathetic, the plain fact is that no one but that person understands what he's experiencing. The focus needs to be on them, not you.

Mental illness is real, as is the pain and disability it can cause. Knowing more about mental illness, signs to watch for and how to offer help can benefit everyone.

The best way to break down stigma and shame about mental illness is to educate ourselves and not be afraid to talk about it.

Taking the Mental Health First Aid training is a great way to begin.

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Get help, learn more

Learn more about Mental Health First Aid through the CPSA website at www.cpsa-rbha.org and click on the "Training" tab at the top right of the home page. For more information, call Steven Nagle at 325-4268 or email him at steven.nagle@cpsa-rbha.org

If you or someone you know is having a life-threatening mental-health emergency (if, for example, thoughts of suicide, weapons or a potential overdose are involved) always call 911. Tell the dispatcher and responders if mental illness or substance abuse is involved.

If your crisis is urgent but not immediately life-threatening, call the Community-Wide Crisis Line at 622-6000 or 1-800-796-6762. The Crisis Response Network will answer the phone and help 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including holidays.

If you need to talk to someone but aren't having a crisis, try the HOPE Inc. Warm Line at 770-9909. It's operated from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. every day. HOPE Inc. is a peer-support organization that focuses on recovery and mental illness.