

## **Good emotional health is just as important as good physical health.**

Don't know when it's appropriate to see a mental health professional.

People may need professional help to maintain good psychological health in much the same way that you need a dentist to examine a toothache, a physician to set a broken bone, and a lawyer to answer legal questions.

Try not to turn a bad day into a major catastrophe.

In addition to taking care of your loved ones and your career – it is important that you take care of yourself. Find time to do things you enjoy. Spend time exercising and eating well. When you put yourself last on the priority list, you're not going to be able to maintain good psychological health.

More concerned with taking care of everyone else and they may forget about themselves. Men, on the other hand, have a tendency to ignore signals that something is distressing them and typically won't talk about their problems.

Psychological health affects physical health. "We've been told for so long to get physical checkups, but taking care of our emotional well being has been sorely overlooked."

"we are whole people – whole in the sense that our minds and bodies are connected. If we only take care of our physical well-being and not our emotional well-being, it could come back to haunt us."

"When you have good emotional health, you're able to experience feelings, share them appropriately and not be overwhelmed by them. This doesn't mean you can never be angry or sad. It means finding a balance and expressing your feelings appropriately."

Good psychological health means having the mental energy to function well at home, at work, and at play. It means being able to eat, sleep, and relax without feeling anxious, depressed or worried.

- Talk to people you trust about what's bothering you.
- Try not to turn a bad day into a major catastrophe – we all have bad days once in a while.
- Find time to do things you enjoy.
- Spend time exercising and eating well.
- Do not put yourself last on the priority list when caring for others.
- Do not ignore signals that something is distressing you.
- Seek professional help if your feelings seem overwhelming.

With all the emphasis being placed on having a healthy body as of late, mental health has taken a backseat. The way a person feels internally, their feelings, how they cope and their thoughts are just as important, if not more so. There are many things that can be done to ensure a person stays healthy mentally. One of those is recognizing when something is amiss and then seeking treatment.

Depression is one of the most common mental health disorders and one that can be treated quite effectively when proper medication and lifestyle changes.

Phobias are another common mental health condition. A phobia is something that a large portion of the population has. An inability to drive or to leave the house is phobias that many people share. Obviously this type of severe fear makes it virtually impossible for the person to live their life in any normal fashion.

When mental disorder is addressed and treated early, the results are very promising. In many cases, physicians work with the family in conjunction with the patient to develop a treatment plan that helps them integrate back into their regular routine. Mental health issues need to be dealt with in order to overcome them. There is absolutely no shame in seeking treatment, in fact it's a noble and respected thing to do.

The recent Te Rau Hinengaro New Zealand Mental Health Survey (Ministry of Health, 2006) estimates that the lifetime risk (up to 75 years of age) of experiencing any common mental disorder such as depression and anxiety is 46.4%. For those affected by mental health problems, about 35% report they have been discriminated against while looking for a job and when using mental health services (Mental Health Foundation, 2004.) Outside the mental health scene, "Violence is all too common in the lives of young New Zealanders – one in five students has experienced unwanted sexual contact, one in five students does not feel safe at school and one in six students has seen adults hurt children in their home."

### Primary Mental Healthcare

Both New Zealand and the United Kingdom data show that between 25 and 30% of patients presenting to their family doctors have had concerns about their mental health. The common problems are depression, anxiety, stress and addiction problems.

Furthermore we need to recognize the reality that mental and physical health are interlinked.

We need to seek to understand the individual implications of an illness for a particular person rather than looking for "disease", and to work in a more holistic way, giving people hope as they work towards recovery.

For people who are improving, we need to make sure they have become completely well again, not letting them slip below the radar when they are "better than they were" or "almost well."

It is ideal to run groups to combat depression. We could have groups for the people who are currently ill ("getting well"); then there are the people who were ill, but are now well ("Staying Well").

### Mental Health Promotion

Yet at present, there is little shared understanding of the term "mental health". While most people are pretty switched on that "healthy" means being free from disease, and to have a well functioning physical body, 'mental health' is more likely to be used as a euphemism for people with mental health difficulties. "Mentally Healthy" may be a better cognate... Implying both the need to strive for, and the possibility of achieving mental health.

The WHO defines mental health as:

"A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with natural stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."

To reach our individual potential for mental health requires social inclusion, economic participation, and freedom from discrimination and violence. Social inclusion refers to our very human need of belonging – to a group, to a family, to a community. Economic participation means not just having a job, but engaged in something (work, education) that has meaning. Freedom from discrimination and abuse means not only living in a situation where one is physically safe, but where each person has real self-determination, control of ones life, and lives in circumstances where diversity and uniqueness is valued.

Action to address these mechanisms requires practical strategies that engage all sectors of our communities: not only the health sector, but justice, education, media, workplaces, and faith communities. Getting each sector on board means doing the intellectual work and legwork to ensure that each sector sees mental health as relevant to their core business.

Mental health promotion projects are strongest when practitioners combine “heart”, “head’ and “hands”.

Any discussion around the concept of mental health promotion should also consider the impact of substance abuse on the mental health of individuals in society. There is recognition that there has been an increase in the number of people with mental health problems who also misuse psychoactive substances. From a clinical point of view substance abuse is the most frequent disorder amongst those who have a serious mental disorder. Population perspective and think about co-morbidity of substance use and mental illness in its broadest sense.

A number of strategies have been adopted to help address the high rates of co-existing disorder in society. For example, treatment providers from alcohol and drug and mental health treatment services are beginning to recognize the benefit of working more collaboratively in order to more effectively meet the needs of these complex needs patients. However, there is still more work to be done. The failure to recognize mental health problems amongst substance users and vice versa, can lead to ineffective management and poor outcomes.

Mental health is everybody's business.