

We Are All Vulnerable to Mental Disorders

Lebanon Daily News, May 3, 2010

As I stated in my last column May is Mental Health Awareness Month. This is a tradition began in 1949 by the national organization of Mental Health America, previously known as the Mental Health Association. The purpose of this tradition is to raise awareness about mental health conditions and the importance of mental wellness for all. May is also known as Mental Health Month. My research of this effort to promote mental health awareness showed that over the years the themes for this month have emphasized everything from early childhood mental health to specific mental illness such as bipolar disorder. This year Mental Health America's theme is "Live Your Live Well". You can find more information on the Mental Health America web site, www.mentalhealthamerica.net.

The Six Pillars of Good Mental Health series was my way of introducing you to mental health awareness. The point of this series was to introduce the community to the concept of good mental health and some measures to maintain good mental health and help to prevent mental illness. Today's column begins a series on the process of resiliency and recovery in the arena of mental health. So let's start with some facts.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) of the

National Institutes of Health mental disorders are common in the United States. It is estimated that 26.2 percent of Americans ages 18 and older – about 1 in 4 adults – suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year; this translates to 57.7 million people based in the 2004 United States (U.S.) Census. The main burden of the mental illness is concentrated in about 6 percent or 1 in 17 persons who suffer from a serious mental illness. Mental disorders are the leading cause of disability in the U.S. and Canada for ages 15 to 44. Many people suffer from more than one mental disorder at a given time – 45 percent of those with any mental disorder meet the criteria for 2 or more disorders with severity strongly related to comorbidity (the occurrence of two or more disorders at the same time).

Additional research shows that 25% of individuals with mental disorders obtain treatment from health care systems while 60% to 80% of persons with heart disease seek treatment. It is also estimated that 40% of persons with serious mental illness do not seek treatment. The economic cost of untreated mental illness is more than 100 billion dollars annually in the United States.

We are all vulnerable to mental illness. Anyone at any age, of any race, gender and income level, and at any time of their lives, can become mentally ill.

This last statement is the point of presenting the statistics. There is

no immunity from mental illness and no vaccination to prevent mental illness. There are things that we can do to prevent mental illness.

Resiliency and Recovery are two tools we can add to our tool box to help prevent mental disorders. These two tools used in combination with the Six Pillars of Good Mental Health will help to develop our ability to deal with the daily challenges of our lives. In my next column I will define and discuss Resiliency as a preventive tool and a tool that promotes good mental health.

The Mental Health Association of Lebanon County will hold a Community Day fund raiser at Hoss's Steak and Sea House in Annville on May 8, 2010. Bring the family out for a brain healthy lunch or dinner and build your social connections. On May 24, 2010 at 6 p.m. we will be showing the movie, License to Wed, at the Allen Theater to promote the laughter, humor and social connections of good mental health. The movie is free with at good will donation.

By Shem H. Heller, Executive Director of the Mental Health Association of Lebanon County