

We Are All Vulnerable to Mental Illness Part 3

Lebanon Daily News, May 31, 2010

Recovery is the second process we use to help us return to what we consider normal after experiencing a situation, event, crisis or disaster. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines recovery as the process of combating a disorder (as alcoholism) or a real or perceived problem; the act, process or an instance of recovering. Recover is defined as to get back, to bring back to normal position or condition; to regain a normal position or condition – recovering from a cold. I think most of us are most familiar with recovery from alcoholism, surgeries, and even recovery of stolen or lost property.

The concept of recovery in the mental health world is fairly new, since the mid-1980's. Although most of the definitions focus on individuals recovering from mental illnesses, I believed the same elements are applicable to each of us in our daily lives. For the purpose of this column, the following two definitions are provided.

"A deeply personal, unique process of changing one's attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills and/or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful, and contributing life even with limitations caused by the illness. Recovery involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one's life as one grows beyond the catastrophic effects of mental illness." **William Anthony**, Director of the Boston Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation Anthony (1993).

"Mental health recovery is a journey of healing and transformation enabling a person with a mental health problem to live a meaningful life in a community of his or her choice while striving to achieve his or her full potential". **National Consensus Statement on Mental Health Recovery** developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Center for Mental Health Services of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

Is recovery a process or journey? It is both. The recovery process involves changing one's attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills

and/or roles; the journey involves healing and transformation – more commonly known as change; and most of us use both the process and the journey to meet our daily challenges. The National Consensus Statement includes ten fundamental components of recovery; this information is available at <http://mentalhealth.samsha.gov/publications/allpubs/sma05-4129/>.

Self Direction: The individual leads, controls, exercises choice over and determines his/her own path; defines his or her own life goals and designs a unique path toward those goals.

Individualized and Person-Centered: There are multiple pathways to recovery based on an individual's unique strengths and resiliencies as well as his or her needs, preferences, experiences (including past trauma), and cultural background in all of its diverse representations.

Empowerment: The individual has the authority to choose from a range of options and to participate in all decisions—including the allocation of resources—that will affect their lives, and are educated and supported in so doing; through empowerment, an individual gains control of his or her own destiny and influences the organizational and societal structures in his or her life.

Holistic: Recovery encompasses an individual's whole life, including mind, body, spirit, and community. Recovery embraces all aspects of life, including housing, employment, education, mental health and healthcare treatment and services, complementary and naturalistic services, addictions treatment, spirituality, creativity, social networks, community participation, and family supports as determined by the person.

Non-Linear: Recovery is not a step-by-step process but one based on continual growth, occasional setbacks, and learning from experience. Recovery begins with an initial stage of awareness in which a person recognizes that positive change is possible.

Strengths-Based: Recovery focuses on valuing and building on the multiple capacities, resiliencies, talents, coping abilities, and inherent worth of individuals.

Peer Support: Mutual support—including the sharing of experiential knowledge and skills and social learning—plays an invaluable role in recovery. Individuals encourage and engage other individuals in recovery and provide each other with a sense of belonging, supportive relationships, valued roles, and community.

Respect: Community, systems, and societal acceptance and appreciation of individuals—including protecting their rights and eliminating discrimination and stigma—are crucial in achieving recovery.

Responsibility: Individuals have a personal responsibility for their own self-care and journey of recovery. Individuals must strive to understand and give meaning to their experiences and identify coping strategies and healing processes to promote their own wellness.

Hope: Recovery provides the essential and motivating message of a better future—that people can and do overcome the barriers and obstacles that confront them. Hope is internalized but can be fostered by peers, families, friends, providers, and others. Hope is the catalyst of the recovery process.

This journey we call life is filled with daily challenges including barriers and obstacles. The above elements of recovery can help us to conquer these challenges and improve our lives. As you face your daily challenges take time to look at how you recover from these challenges and the effect the challenges have on your life.

The next column will provide an overview of the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP); a tool to assist individuals with mental illness in their recovery journey.

The Mental Health Association of Lebanon County will be presenting "An Evening in Greece" at Mount Hope Estate and Winery on June 12, 2010. Tickets are still available but space is limited. Please contact us at 273-5781 for more information.

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