

B4Stage4: Changing the Way We Think About Mental Health

When we think about cancer, heart disease, or diabetes, we don't wait years to treat them. We start before Stage 4—we begin with prevention. When people are in the first stage of those diseases and are beginning to show signs or symptoms like a persistent cough, high blood pressure, or high blood sugar, we try immediately to reverse these symptoms. We don't ignore them. In fact, we develop a plan of action to reverse and sometimes stop the progression of the disease. So why don't we do the same for individuals who are dealing with potentially serious mental illness?

1 in 5 American adults will have a diagnosable mental health condition in any given year.

50 percent of Americans will meet the criteria for a diagnosable mental health condition sometime in their life, and half of those people will develop conditions by the age of 14.

Stages of Mental Health Conditions

<p>Stage 1</p> <p>Mild Symptoms and Warning Signs</p>	<p>At Stage 1, a person begins to show symptoms of a mental health condition, but is still able to maintain the ability to function at home, work or school—although perhaps not as easily as before they started to show symptoms. Often there is a sense that something is “not right.”</p>
<p>Stage 2</p> <p>Symptoms Increase in Frequency and Severity and Interfere with Life Activities and Roles</p>	<p>At Stage 2, it usually becomes obvious that something is wrong. A person's symptoms may become stronger and last longer or new symptoms may start appearing on top of existing ones, creating something of a snowball effect. Performance at work or school will become more difficult, and a person may have trouble keeping up with family duties, social obligations or personal responsibilities.</p>
<p>Stage 3</p> <p>Symptoms Worsen with Relapsing and Recurring Episodes Accompanied by Serious Disruption in Life Activities and Roles</p>	<p>At Stage 3, symptoms have continued to increase in severity, and many symptoms are often taking place at the same time. A person may feel as though they are losing control of their life and the ability to fill their roles at home, work or school.</p>
<p>Stage 4</p> <p>Symptoms are Persistent and Severe and Have Jeopardized One's Life</p>	<p>By Stage 4, the combination of extreme, prolonged and persistent symptoms and impairment often results in development of other health conditions and has the potential to turn into a crisis event like unemployment, hospitalization, homelessness or even incarceration. In the worst cases, untreated mental illnesses can lead to loss of life an average of 25 years early.</p>

Early Identification and Intervention

Catching mental health conditions early is known as Early Identification and Intervention. However, many times people may not realize that their symptoms are being caused by a mental health condition or feel ashamed to pursue help because of the stigma associated with mental illness. It's up to all of us to know the signs and take action so that mental illnesses can be caught early and treated, and we can live up to our full potential. Even though mental illnesses may require intensive, long-term treatment and a lot of hard work at the later stages, people can and do recover and reclaim their lives.

Screening

One way to see if you may be experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition is to take a screening. Visit www.mhawisconsin.org/screening to take a quick, confidential screening for a variety of mental health conditions including anxiety, depression, mood disorders or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Use your screening results to start a conversation with your primary care provider, or a trusted friend or family member and begin to plan a course of action for addressing your mental health.

Real. Common. Treatable.

Remember, mental health conditions are not only common, they are treatable. There is a wide variety of treatment options for mental illnesses ranging from talk therapy to medication to peer support, and it may take some time for a person to find the right treatment or combination of treatments that works best for them. But when they do, the results can be truly amazing and life changing.

Sources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (September 4, 2014). The NSDUH Report: Substance Use and Mental Health Estimates from the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Overview of Findings. Rockville, MD.

Ronald C. Kessler et al., Lifetime Prevalence and Age-of-Onset Distributions of DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication, 62 Arch. Gen. Psychiatry 593, 595 (2005).

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