

Mental Health Comes First

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Human beings are complex and challenging in terms of relationships and their mental and physical health. Today there seems to be a crisis in the following areas: Thinking, Problem solving, Behavioral, Emotional, Faith/hope and in Delayed gratification. Anger management classes are on the rise as never before. Self-control is lacking because of poorly learned behavior and the inability to communicate and express negative emotions.

We are constantly looking for answers for our negative impulsive actions. Impulsive control is as a neurological function of the frontal lobe that controls inhibitions and judgment. Those with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome have a damaged Corpus Callosum due to alcohol. This causes a child to act first and process thoughts later, resulting in acting impulsively regardless of consequences. The Corpus Callosum connects the right brain to the left meaning it connects feelings and logical thoughts. Impulsivity occurs from feelings without logical thoughts causing negative consequences. It is interesting to note that a person under the influence of any mind-altering substance will act the same way.

Some struggling with their thoughts and feelings seek a Psychotherapist for help. When cognitive behavioral therapy fails to bring the desired results, a Psychiatric assessment may be suggested. In Canada there is a waiting list to see a Psychiatrist because it is paid for by OHIP (Ontario Health Insurance Plan). Some Psychotherapists partner with Psychiatrists through Psychotherapy Matters which provides a virtual service of seeing a Psychiatrist within two weeks. The client has their family doctor complete a referral form to fax to Psychotherapy Matters where the appointment with the Psychiatrist is set up. The appointment is a virtual one with the Psychiatrist in the Psychotherapist's office. Clients appreciate this service so they can get the medication they need and because their Psychotherapist follows-up with their assessment.

More young Canadians are suffering from serious anxiety disorders. One Psychologist says 25% of his patients are affected by anxiety disorders. Some physical symptoms are: Muscle tension, inability to relax, restlessness, irritability and sleep that is disturbed by worry. There are six main anxiety disorders which are: Phobia, Panic disorder, Generalized Anxiety disorder, Obsessive compulsive disorder, Acute Stress Disorder and Post-traumatic stress disorder. The most common treatment for anxiety is cognitive-behavior therapy which helps clients face their fears. Some use Art Therapy as a treatment where one's blocked feelings can be expressed. Cognitive

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behavioral therapy is used to challenge fears and desensitize them so they are able to believe that options and possibilities exist.

It seems our society is becoming more "pleasure loving" and delaying immediate gratification, rewards or pleasures is not the norm. Unfortunately they do not believe, great things come to those who wait. Professor Walter Mischel at Stanford University conducted the Stanford Marshmallow experiment with children ages 4 to 6. They were asked to wait 15 minutes before eating a marshmallow. The results showed, some did and some didn't eat the marshmallow.

When followed into adolescences they found the children who delayed gratification were psychologically better adjusted, dependable, self-motivated and had better grades in high school. Finally, in 2011 the research concluded that these characteristics remained with the children for life.

Some benefits of delaying gratification are: having something bigger and better later than having something now. Delaying the desire improves the willpower and helps one reach your long-term goals faster. Some examples: saving money, drinking water instead of alcohol, eating an apple instead of a chocolate bar, investing in a business for future gains, remain working at a boring job until you get something better or working hard as an Olympic athlete and not taking drugs. Some may find the following five strategies helpful to delay gratification: know your values, know what you want to achieve, create a plan, prioritize and reward yourself.

Those who are unsuccessful in managing their gratifications may become mentally ill. Unfortunately, in society, mental illness is no respect of persons. The Mood Disorders website has listed some well-known figures in our society with a mental illness, such as Alexander the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, Barbara Bush, Winston Churchill, Diana Princess of Wales, Tipper Gore, Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Nader and George Patton. (www.ndmda.org)

It has been reported that volunteers at the National Hope line Network have answered over seven million calls with the highest percentage (60%) being from those in a mental health crisis. Mental illness can be described as a disturbance in thoughts and emotions that decreases a person's capacity to cope with the challenges of everyday life. In the USA the cost of caring for those with mental illness is \$7.9 Billion and 3.8% of hospital admissions are due

to anxiety, bipolar disorders, schizophrenia, major depression, personality disorders, eating disorders and suicidal behavior.

The Canadian Statistics reveal that 20% of all Canadians experience a mental illness. It is noted that 49% suffer from depression and anxiety and never went to see a doctor. The impact on youth is as follows: 10-20% are affected by mental illness, 5% of males ages 12-19 have experienced a major depressive episode. 10% of females ages 12-19 have experienced a major depressive episode. 16% Suicides are by those 25-44 years old and 24% of the suicides are by those 15 to 24 years old. Unfortunately, only 1 out of 5 children who need mental health services receive them.

People with a mental illness have higher rates of addiction and those with addictions have a higher rate of mental illness. A study in western Canada found that 1/3 of those with a mental illness used substances and 1/3 of those with an alcohol dependency had a mental illness. It was discovered that concurrent disorders were misidentified because one disorder mimics the other. This is a challenge for mental health professionals to be better prepared to meet this need.

A study released in January 2010 showed depression and suicidal thoughts are on the rise on campuses in Canada and USA. Psychotherapists are seeing more clients in regards to suicide ideation, attempts and family members of those who died by suicide [1]. Those grieving the loss of a loved one experience a sense of hopelessness and helplessness because they were denied the opportunity to help or comfort them.

Some mothers worry about their children's nutritional needs and how their moods and behaviours are affected. Some foods, alcohol and drugs can deplete the body of essential vitamins and minerals and those with concurrent disorders need a nutritious diet to regain a healthy body and mind. I recommend a plant based diet which makes the best blood to build up the body. In my book *Vegetarian Cooking Today* there are helpful simple recipes. Dietary intake needs to be adequate to make healthy neurotransmitters so messages are sent and received properly from the central nervous system. Ludington & Diehl, 2000 state that, "foods rich in Dopamine are almonds, blueberries, peanuts and sesame seeds. The body has the ability to prevent many diseases...if you provide it with whole-food nutrition" (The Great Physician As Counsellor, pg 15). It is a good idea to be happy when eating because it aids in digestion. The Bible states, "a merry heart does good like a medicine. Laughter and exercise produce endorphins which decrease depression, anxieties and suicidal ideation. Our God who inspired the Bible to be written sure knew what He was talking about [2-5].

Research has established through brain imaging that we are spiritual and have the capacity to have a relationship with God. Many are lacking a positive experience with God resulting in spiritually sickness. The use of cognitive behavioral therapy, forgiveness therapy and laughter therapy improves one's mental, emotional, physical and spiritual healing. Timothy Jennings, MD in his book "The God-Shaped Brain" states, brain research has found that our beliefs affect our physical, mental and spiritual health."He states

that, what you believe about God actually changes your brain. Patterns of self-defeating behaviors and toxic relationships are caused by distorted images of God. Assess one's view of God and how it relates to their daily life [6-10].

Some unknown person shared these positive thoughts on Warning Signs of Good Health. Twelve are listed and if a person has several or more of them, they will rarely need to visit a doctor.

- Regular flare-ups of a supportive network of friends and family.
- Chronic positive expectations.
- Repeated episodes of gratitude and generosity.
- Increased appetite for physical activity.
- Marked tendency to identify and express feelings.
- Compulsion to contribute to society.
- Lingering sensitivity to the feelings of others.
- Habitual behavior related to seeking new challenges.
- Craving for peak experiences.
- Tendency to adapt to changing conditions.
- Feelings of spiritual involvement.
- Persistent sense of humor.

Today we need to promote the prevention of mental illness. Health care systems need to be challenged to do more mental health promotion to lower health care costs and avoid concurrent disorders. We can teach people to be aware of mental health symptoms and encourage them to get help immediately. We need to encourage listening, caring and to practice hugging loved ones. In the community people need to take a stand against mind altering substances being sold, but most of all, everyone needs to educate others on how to make healthy choices. Finally, choose to be spiritually healthy and keep hope alive in the mind.

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