

July 1, 2016

Friday Focus



Unlocking the Stigma of Mental Disorders

"Our dream of the day when stigma no longer exists, when services are available to all, and when every individual can look forward to a happy and fulfilling future is within our reach."

- Rosalynn Carter

Any diagnosis related to mental health is associated with a number of challenges. One challenge often noted with patients who have a mental disorder is the stigma associated with the actual diagnosis. A stigma is a complex construct that includes public, self, and structural components. It directly affects people with mental illness as well as their support system, provider network, and community resources. These harmful effects can include:

- an unwillingness to seek medical attention
- limited opportunities for work, school, or social activities
- trouble finding housing
- being thought of as unstable by friends, family, and even coworkers
- lack of health care benefits needed to cover treatment for mental illnesses
- the fear of being harassed or intimidated

From the public viewpoint, a person with mental illness can be characterized as erratic and unsafe. Society points the finger at the patient and believes the patient is the cause of his own illness.

This stigma can make patients reluctant to seek medical attention. As health care professionals, we play a vital role in helping alleviate and eradicate these stigmas, and we have multiple ways to help:

- advocating for patients with mental disorders
- promoting a stigma-free environment for patients
- encouraging unrestricted and open dialog for patients and their families
- educating our self, staff, and other peers on mental disorders

As health care professionals, we want patients to feel more comfortable seeking treatment for mental disorders. Because of this focus, we expect to see an increase in patients age six and older who were hospitalized for mental illness and return for their seven-day and 30-day follow-up appointment, according to NCQA's HEDIS 2016 guidelines.

For more information on mental illness and stigmas, visit:

AssociationforPsychologicalScience.org

As always, we appreciate your ideas and feedback. Thank you for the quality work you do! All editions of Friday Focus are available on the SWHP website: <https://swhp.org/en-us/prov/news/providers-friday-focus>.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frances Parker".

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