What Is Mental Health?

Welcome to the first mental health article for the Midwest North District website! I am truly honored to be providing mental health information for our district. This first article will provide the reader with the appropriate terminology to use and a brief description of those service providers in the mental health helping field.

Terminology

The following terms are sometimes used interchangeably or simply because we do not know what term to use – mental health, mental illness, and mental wellness. Often the terms mental health and mental illness are the terms we hear about the most. As we go deeper into understanding mental health and mental health awareness, it will be important to understand and be able to differentiate between these and other terms.

Terminology is very important because inappropriately labeling can be damaging to individuals. MentalHealth.gov defines mental health as “includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being” which may impact how we think, feel and act. Additionally, our mental health may determine how we handle life stressors, relate to others in our lives and environment as well as our ability to make appropriate decisions (<https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health>). So, mental health is the overarching umbrella that constitutes or includes our thoughts, feelings and behaviors. According to Psychiatry.Org (<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-mental-illness>) mental illnesses (disorders) are actual health conditions where maladaptive changes in our thoughts, feelings and/or behaviors create difficulties for us. People experiencing maladaptive thoughts, moods, or behaviors tend to have difficulty functioning in their daily lives in the areas of work, social, or relational (such as family). Most individuals associated the term “mental illness” as the all-encompassing umbrella for understanding all mental health until 1996 when Congress and other professional organizations such as the National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) began emphasizing the brain, brain research, and national public education. Mental wellness, then, focused on the *treatment* of mental illnesses as “real” conditions like physical health conditions. Research found that mental illnesses could be treated with psychiatric medications and thus promoted the “treatable” of said illnesses. Due to the damage that can be caused emotionally by labeling, using the correct terminology will increase the possibility of preserving what fragile emotions may be present.

Mental Health Service Providers

There are many service care providers for those who are experiencing psychological, emotional and behavioral problems. The following are the basic types of mental health professionals. Knowing what type of service providers are available will help an individual choose a provider based on their specific need.

* Psychiatrist: is a medical doctor (M.D.) who specializes in emotional issues. As a medical doctor the psychiatrist can also prescribe medications. The psychiatrist, however, cannot conduct psychological testing and evaluation.
* Psychologists: specialize in the science of behaviors, emotions, and thoughts. They treat anything from relationship problems to mental illnesses, through psychotherapy. A psychologist usually holds a doctoral degree, such as a Ph.D. Psychologists can prescribe medication in some states under the direct supervision of a psychiatrist. They work in places like private offices, hospitals, or schools.
* Psychiatric Nurse: a registered nurse specializing in mental who administers psychiatric medications and may do some counseling.
* Mental Health Counselor: a master’s degree level specialist in mental health who provides counseling to clientele with a wide range of daily adjustment problems.
* Family and Marriage Therapist: specializes in common problems that come up in families and couples that focus on differences and/or arguments.
* Addiction Counselor: treat people with addictions, typically substances and gambling but can also focus on sexual addictions/pornography and hoarding.
* Social Worker: specializes in helping people cope with issues in their lives such as housing, domestic violence and child abuse.

A mental health professional’s training depends on their specific field as well as the state they practice in. Psychologists usually require a Ph.D., or Psy.D. Psychiatrists require medical degrees. Almost every state requires all types of counselor categories to have a college degree with specialized training. A few tips to consider when thinking of obtaining the services of a mental health professional: licensing, masters or doctorate degree, and clinical experience. Do not be afraid to seek professional help when needed! It is ok to seek help.