

Mercy Matters

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Healthy News for a Healthier Community from Mercy Medical Center

Behavioral Health Expands To Meet Growing Demand

When Mercy's Behavioral Health Center opened a year ago on the hospital campus, its staff certainly knew they would be meeting a significant need in Southern Oregon. However, no one could have guessed just how significant the need was.

One year, one expansion, and 45 new employees later, it is crystal clear. Growing to accommodate the demand for its services, the Behavioral Health Center has in short order become Southern Oregon's most comprehensive resource for adolescent, adult, and senior mental health services.

In June, the center's staff celebrated two milestones — the facility's first anniversary and the opening of its new senior psychiatry wing. The expansion increases the Behavioral Health Center's size from 18 to 29 beds and allows staff to better address the unique and complex needs of seniors with behavioral disorders. In addition to 11 new beds dedicated to seniors, the center offers 11 adolescent and seven adult beds. Services are provided in both inpatient and partial hospitalization settings.

"We are truly a tertiary care center, which means we are able to offer the complete range of inpatient mental health services," says Susan Driver, who directs the facility. "We don't have to refer anyone out of the community."

continued on back

EMPLOYEE THOUGHTS

"When kids come here they don't trust anybody. But I can't think of anyone who has left here without trusting us."

Dave, RN



"There's real teamwork and camaraderie here. There's a feeling of kinship with other employees that's very much like a family."



Bill, Therapist



In just one year, employees, Tim Stephanos and Lee Van Beuzekom, have watched Mercy Behavioral Health Center grow dramatically.

Director's Commitment Hits Close to Home

Susan Driver's commitment to increasing the public's understanding of psychiatric illness is every bit as personal as it is professional. Her own mother was almost victimized by the stigma that too often follows people who suffer from, or exhibit symptoms of, psychiatric disorders.

Driver, the director of Mercy's Behavioral Health Center, uses the example of her mother to give hope to others in similar circumstances. Her message: "Too often people suffer needlessly," she says.

"My mother is 85. Her children and grandchildren are farmers, doctors, scientists, and teachers. She was fiercely independent all of her life, even after the death of her husband of 30 years. Except for a mild heart condition, she had nearly perfect health. Then, suddenly, she hemorrhaged from a stomach ulcer. While hospitalized, she experienced one setback after another — first her condition worsened, then she underwent surgery for a cardiac pacemaker implant. Her diseased gallbladder was removed, and while recovering from that surgery she developed pneumonia. Her sons decided she was nearing death, and when she was able they took her home.

"There her physical condition began to improve, but she became increasingly forgetful

and disoriented. She wasn't able to tell day from night. She grew more anxious and agitated. She couldn't sleep, and she took to pacing the floor. She became disturbed when hearing sounds or noises like birds or the television.

"The family met to decide if she needed to be placed in a nursing home. I suggested the problems may be psychiatric and recommended our mother be admitted to an inpatient program especially for seniors. The idea horrified other family members. They felt psychiatric conditions were something only 'street' people experienced, not their mother. However, they finally agreed to consider inpatient hospitalization rather than long-term nursing home care.

"My mother was suffering from delirium secondary to her medical condition. After being diagnosed and treated in the hospital, all of her symptoms were resolved, and she was able to return home. Her overall physical health had declined, but her independence and ability to relate to others were restored.

"This happened three years ago. Since then, my mother has suffered a stroke and she continues treatment for depression. However, she still lives at home, with the help of family and friends, and she continues to participate in and contribute to the lives of those she loves and who love her."



"Everybody deserves treatment. Everybody deserves to lead a happy, healthy life."

Pam, Registered Nurse

"I truly enjoy working with kids and their families. It's a very difficult thing for families to go through when their children need our services. But our staff is very supportive and empathetic."

Karen, Therapist

Behavioral Health Expands *continued from front*

A significant problem in America, psychiatric illness is even more prevalent in Oregon. A 1994 survey of the Oregon Health Division indicated that Oregon's suicide rate was 63 percent higher than the national average and 78 percent higher in children ages 5 to 14.

Depression is common in seniors, who are increasingly confronted with major life changes such as the death of a loved one, the move from a home, or loss of function. In many other instances, Driver says, psychiatric illness in seniors is related to medical conditions.

When psychiatric conditions are recognized and appropriately treated, the impact they have on patients' lives can be dramatically reduced. Of course, the same holds true for adolescent and adult mental illnesses. This underscores the importance of having access to a local resource that can provide comprehensive education, assessment, and treatment.

"As with any medical condition, early identification and treatment can prevent more serious symptoms, reducing the need for hospitalization," Driver says.

One of the keys to accomplishing this goal is to dispell myths about psychiatric illness, Driver adds. "Significant research has been conducted on the origin of psychiatric illnesses, and new medications have been developed that are very effective in their treatment. We want people to know they don't have to suffer in silence because of fear or uncertainty."

His Story

Depression

He is 16, and seems shy. Other kids stay away from him, and he has felt lonely most of his life. Lately he has become preoccupied with death and the devil. His performance in school is declining. He doesn't wake easily in the morning; at night it's hard to fall asleep. He seems fearful and has started talking to himself.

His parents suspect he is using drugs. They find a note in his room in which their son writes, "I don't want to live anymore."

He is suffering from severe depression. Children can begin suffering from

the symptoms of depression very early in their lives. Left untreated, the symptoms can become severe. Some sufferers may begin hearing and seeing things. As adolescents with depression struggle to fit in, their disease can even become life-threatening as they begin to view suicide as their only means of relieving their symptoms and feeling of despair.

With medication and therapy, the risk of this young man harming himself diminished, and his hallucinations stopped. He has resumed a rewarding school and family life. With continued treatment, he can live a normal life.

Her Story

Bipolar Disorder

She is a wife and mother of three lovely children. She is intelligent, has always done things well, and is actively involved in helping others, at home and work, in school and the community, at church. She always said she didn't need much sleep to keep going.

She had another side, however. There were times when she was deeply despondent and withdrawn from family and friends. Because it was never long before she bounced back, everyone attributed her bad days to the stress of all her activities. Then one day she phoned her husband at work with a message. She felt he and the children would be better off without her. That's why, she hoped he would under-

stand, she took the pills.

Because she had attempted to take her life, she was required to see a psychiatrist after she had recovered from her overdose. It was then she learned she suffered from Bipolar Disorder. Individuals with Bipolar Disorder are often the brightest, most creative, most energetic people. The disorder is often unidentified because those who suffer from it may function well for a long time. Stress and other factors can worsen the condition. It often takes a major event, either the result of mania, poor judgment, depression or a suicide attempt, to cause the illness to be treated. With treatment, this woman returned to her family and maintains a productive life.



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