

Help To Provide Mental Health



By Dr. R. Pletsch

Mental health issues are a concern of many of us. I have dealt with the problem of finding mental health personnel for many people who have needed assistance, both in the family and as an administrator. I have often heard the medical offices say they are not accepting new patients. This got even worse during COVID. During this period more people began to understand that they knew people who needed help. Because of this, finding necessary help became even harder.

I found an article by Lisa Harlon in Josephite Harvest with the story a little different than what you usually see. It is about Rawley Andrews, Jr., executive director of The American Psychiatric Association Foundation. He has spent much of his career working on expanding access to mental health care.

Mr. Andrews has been leading the way in trying to keep the caregivers healthy and get more to join the field. He believes we, as a nation, will need even more caregivers as our life expectancy is increasing and the baby boomers are of the age that they will need more caregivers than we have.

Caregivers can be part time, full time or even live with the patient 24/7. Who do they serve? Sick patients that the family needs assistance after a hospital stay, or those that are simply not capable of living alone or afford assisted living. Many have disabilities. Many of them have dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

The job can involve people who suffer depression. The caregivers often must understand that they are giving service to someone who may never get better than the first day they meet. This can be hard to grasp and cause much concern. Mr. Andrews has developed courses for both caregivers and the families they serve. These classes stress that keeping the caregiver healthy helps the family member they are helping. If you must hire caregivers, you must remember that they have personal lives and might need time to attend to private matters.

Many agencies are available to provide this care and many of them have substitutes available and should be utilized. Research in Psychology and Aging informs us that grandparents are often used as caregivers. It is usually good for them because when they are given tests they score higher in memory and vocabulary than others of similar age that do not have that responsibility. But there is the worry that grand[parents might feel obligated.

Mr. Andrews' article lists stats that are very enlightening. More than 43% of individuals with a diagnosed mental illness do not receive professional care. This is attributed to the cost of the service, lack of personnel, or insurance limitations. Among the mental health issues the most common are anxiety disorders and that over a lifetime they believe 31% of all adults will suffer this at some point.

We should realize that anyone may have these problems, including the caregiver. Please be aware of the situation and try to make sure for the health of your family that the caregiver is also healthy. There are several organizations in our area that can help you get some help, like counseling. Please use them.