

I'M NOT CRAZY: A NEW PERSPECTIVE INTO MENTAL HEALTH

*“I’m not crazy...
why are you sending me there...!!”*

Irrespective of how we get referred to a Mental Health Professional, this tends to be our first response. For centuries and even today, we continue to feel that our “mental” health is somehow different from our overall health. Not true! If anything, our mental health is a strong predictor of our health in general. After all, the brain controls every part of our bodies!! Let’s think about it—our eyes, mouth, speech, taste, smell, pain, pleasure, limbs, heart and other organs, emotions, on and on and on. There’s no part of the body not controlled by our brains.

Our behavior is also mediated not only by our environment, but also by neurochemistry in our brains. We can probably all recall, “Old Aunt Fanny...up in the attic...”, taking her a plate and running down the stairs as fast as we could. Or, remember “Old Mr. Joe”, on the corner, looking in trash cans and talking to himself? Too often, we picture mental illness in congruence with these scenarios. When we think of treatment, too often we imagine the old movie, “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” with all the “crazy” people, mean nurses and horrific SHOCK Treatments!! “Oh, no, I don’t want anything to do with that!! Nor do I want to sit and talk about my problems while someone is writing their grocery list!”

But wait, has anything changed in all these years? Yes, absolutely!! First and foremost, our thinking about “Help-Seeking” is changing and we are much more likely to seek help from our Pastors, Therapists, Psychologists and Psychiatrists. Still, much too much stigma persists; yet the more we talk about it and understand, the more accepting we will become of others and ourselves! With Clinical/Major Depressive Disorder affecting about 10% of the population, I’m certain each one of us knows someone who suffers from this illness, which can be totally disabling.

Clinical Depression is more than feeling “sad” in an appropriate situation, such as loss of a loved one or loss of a job. Major Depression represents a myriad of symptoms that persist for at least a 2-week period. Symptoms such as feeling sad, hopeless, helpless, guilty, having low self-esteem, change in sleep and appetite to more than or less than usual, no enjoyment, trouble concentrating, forgetfulness, crying spells and thoughts of suicide, in addition to other similar feelings. There are many theories as to “why” this illness occurs, such as a traumatic event, heredity, increase and/or decrease in hormones and malfunction of neurotransmitters and receptors; just to name a few.

Treatment modalities are also diverse with specific forms of talk therapies, medications to combat neurologic changes in the brain, homeopathic therapies, shock treatments, magnetic brain stimulation and even no therapy at all. True, depression can go away in time and at times all by itself. No one knows why; however, the suffering, while waiting, is needless. So there are many forms of treatment available, but the very first and most important step is recognizing there is a problem and getting help to fix it!



*Karen Sistrunk Cowan, MD
Psychiatrist*