Care of Clients with Mental Illness

By Mary Knutson RN

What is Mental Illness?

- *Anxiety Disorders* such as phobias, panic disorder or generalized anxiety

- *Mood Disorders*, such as major depression and bipolar disorder

- *Psychosis*, with disturbed perception and hallucinations and delusions, such as schizophrenia

- *Disturbances of cognitive function*, such as dementia, sometimes from Alzheimer's disease or blockages of arteries supplying the brain

- *Other disorders*, like substance abuse, eating disorders, attention deficit/hyperactivity, or traumatic brain injury.

Why Should We Be Concerned?

- 20-22% of individuals in U.S. suffer from diagnosable Mental Illness yearly (1 out of 5 adults).

- Suicide is a major cause of death in the U.S. And depression is expected to be the second leading cause of disability worldwide by 2010.

- Bipolar disorder has a 1% prevalence rate for adults in U.S. Those individuals tend to be homeless and chemically dependent.

Mental Illness is a Huge Problem

- About 2-3% of young women have anorexia nervosa or a variant. It has the highest mortality of all the psychiatric diseases

- Untreated/mistreated illness costs business, families and government $113 billion dollars annually

- Mental Illness causes increased severity of other chronic illness, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease

Warning Signs of Mental Illness

- A marked change in personality
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities
- Strange ideas or delusions
- Excessive anxiety
- Prolonged feelings of sadness

- A marked change in eating or sleeping habits
- Thinking or talking about suicide
- Extreme highs and lows
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Excessive anger, hostility
- Violent behavior
- Irrational fears

Warning Signs in Children

- Frequent crying
- Frequent requests or hints for help
- Constant anxiety, worry or preoccupation
- Fears or phobias that are unreasonable or interfere with normal activities
- Low self-esteem and little self-confidence

- Inability to concentrate on schoolwork and other age-appropriate tasks
- Decline in school performance that doesn't improve
- Loss of interest in playing
- Isolation from other children; fighting
- Setting fires

Begin by Seeking Help

- If experiencing warning signs, a mental health professional should be consulted.

- Most people seek help from their physician or Nurse Practitioner rather than a mental health professional, so counseling may not be accessed.

- Antidepressants are among the most commonly prescribed drugs in the world.

- Between 1990 and 1995, new or continued antidepressant prescription increased approximately 73%.

- Primary care office visits for depression doubled during 1988 and 1994.

Clinical Diagnosis and Treatment

- Suicide risk should be assessed
- Determine whether complications of other mental health or physical problems and other life problems exist
- Recommend cognitive behavior therapies
- For adolescents, psychotherapy is usually effective in treating depression, but studies are inconclusive about whether antidepressants are.
- Medical follow-up should be done for anyone who is taking psychotropic medication or antidepressants

How to Develop Specialized Health Education Programs

- Use simple, everyday language, not medical terms
- Use concrete objects or pictures to convey abstract ideas
- Address health risks, like smoking, lack of exercise, poor nutrition, and sexual habits
- Be clear and concise
- Demonstrate what is expected

- Provide structured opportunities for learning
- Give purpose and meaning to activities. Let them know why the material is important
- Use a multi-sensory approach
- Be supportive, encouraging and optimistic in your approach
- Practice and review frequently

Coverage of Mental Illness

- Traditionally, health insurance programs have imposed greater restrictions on payments for mental health and substance abuse treatment than payments for medical and surgical care.

- Insurers feared that coverage of mental health services would be too costly due to long-term and extended hospital stays.

- Some legislation is making steps to decrease the gaps in coverage. The current trend is toward managed care and de-institutionalization.

- Medicare and Medicaid provide coverage for mental health care and some community programs to decrease rate of re-hospitalizations, and promote highest possible functioning in least restrictive environment.

Community Treatment Programs

- Set up an aftercare appointment during inpatient treatment,
- Community Nurse to see client before discharge for smooth transition to home or community based treatment program.
- Communication and collaboration must exist between the hospital and aftercare program.
- Encourage involvement of the family and make appropriate referrals.
- May include health education/promotion due to lifestyle factors such as obesity or smoking.

Community Support Programs:

- Emphasis is on social services, day treatment, and housing programs to lessen hospital stays or prevent re-hospitalization

- Case management to assist former psychiatric patients with survival, compliance with treatment, rehabilitation, and independent living in community setting

- Includes medication monitoring and interaction

- Assistance to follow-up appointments

Assertive Clinical Treatment: Comprehensive Mental Health Care

- Multidisciplinary team and peer counseling
- Identifies fixed point of responsibility for clients
- Individualized, ongoing treatment program defined by client's needs
- Involves all needed support systems for holistic treatment
- 24 hour a day services, including respite care and crisis intervention

What Do Clients Want to Be Taught?

- Psychiatric medication and side effects
- How to get what you need from the mental health system
- Causes of mental illness
- Ways to solve problems
- How to get enjoyment from life and feel good about themselves
- Coping with depression and loneliness
- Improving communication with relatives

Side Effects of Medications

- <u>All</u> of the psychotropic medications and antidepressants have significant side effects.

- Newer medications do not have the extrapyramidal symptoms and flat affect.

- Choice of medication may include cost, adverse-effects, drug interactions, and other medical conditions.

- Health education about medications, monitoring, and assistance with obtaining or setting up medications may increase compliance.

- St. John's Wort may be effective for some mild depression. Adverse effects occur less often when compared with antidepressant medications.

Decreasing Mental Illness's Stigma

- Behavior during acute psychotic episode is bewildering and frightening.

- Contrary to portrayals of violence and dangerousness, most people with mental illnesses are not a danger to others.

- If people can better understand the "inner world" of mental illness, they would became more sensitive and demonstrate more empathy.

- A teaching strategy is reading personal memoirs of mental illness experiences.

"Open Minds-Open Doors is the theme of an international public education campaign launched by the World Health Organization and its many partners.

Role of Advance Practice Nurses

- Develop health education programs for illness prevention and self-care

- Restructure the funding mandates of the current health care delivery system from an illness and treatment model, to illness prevention and health promotion model

- Develop comprehensive training materials

- Do further research and suggest future health planning interventions based on survey data

Definition of Mental Health Organization
(From Center for Health Statistics Web Site)

- Freestanding psychiatric outpatient clinics
- General hospitals providing separate psychiatric services
- Partial care organization (program of ambulatory services)
- Private mental hospitals, Psychiatric hospitals, state and county mental hospitals
- Residential treatment centers for emotionally disturbed children
- Psychiatric Inpatient unit of Veteran's Admin.
- Multi-service mental health organization, including two or more of the above)

Conclusion

- With such a multi-faceted and intense topic as mental illness, it is good that there are psychiatric nurses to specialize in it.

- However, all nurses should have an understanding of its significance, as well as its care and treatment.

- Mental illness often presents in combination with other health problems. All nurses must be prepared to deal with clients or patients with mental illness.