



Mental health care advances give individuals more options for help

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Each year in May, we celebrate Mental Health Month on a national level. Personally, I celebrate Mental Health Month each month.

As I see it, each day presents an opportunity for me to tell at least one more person about mental health services available in Southwestern Indiana, appropriate treatment methods, places to call for help and other information that is helpful in guiding the person on the path to recovery.

To better educate people about mental health, I must first paint the story of how we got to where we are in 2011 and then provide you with an understanding of the capability of our community to provide quality services to its citizens.

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy envisioned a system of care that would allow individuals to seek mental health treatment in their own communities rather than in institutional settings.

With 530,000 Americans living in mental institutions (more than 1,400 individuals were living in Evansville State Hospital), Kennedy understood that these individuals too had hopes and dreams for their lives, and he called for a "bold new approach" to caring for those with mental illness.

It is interesting to think that if you ask anyone about Kennedy, they will either talk about his renowned family, his untimely death or some of his famous quotes, such as "Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country."

But Kennedy did much more than he is recognized for: one of those was the enactment of federal funding to provide community-based mental health care

and open what we commonly refer to today as behavioral health care facilities.

By the 1970s, breakthroughs in psychiatric medication and treatment were beginning to arise.

With the establishment of increased community-based services, thousands of individuals were afforded the opportunity to return home to their families and begin learning skills they needed to live independently in the community.

Through the years, new services have emerged to minimize hospitalization of individuals with mental illnesses.

These services include residential programs, homeless services, crisis intervention services, outpatient treatment, individual and group therapy and case management.

In the next four columns, I hope to provide you with a glimpse of the array of mental health services available, a look into support groups and their benefit, a refresher on suicide prevention and ways to live your life well, based on a model used by Mental Health America.

When you think of mental illness, what do you think of? Do you think of psychiatric facilities such as old hospital wards, state hospitals and asylums? Or do you think of services that allow individuals to continue working, attending school, enjoying their families and contributing to their communities while seeking professional help to get them through disorders or life's difficulties?

Amazingly, all the things listed above are the same things that

individuals with physical illnesses such as diabetes, cancer and heart conditions hope to continue. Just as individuals with physical illness, those with mental illness want to be afforded the same opportunities so that they too can be enriched and have purposeful lives.

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