



Acceptance of mental problems, support can facilitate recovery

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Many mental health providers are transforming their clinical approach from one that emphasizes the deficits and disabilities of a person with a mental illness to an approach that focuses on their strengths and goals for recovery.

What is recovery?

There are many definitions of recovery, but basically, it is a way of developing a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life despite limitations caused by an illness or accident.

Recovery is a very individual process that involves the person altering her attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills and roles in order to develop new meaning and purpose in her life. "Recovery is what people with disabilities do."

The concept of recovery is well accepted in regards to physical illness. We no longer think people with spinal cord injury, blindness or diabetes are incapable of living full and complete lives.

We recognize that these people can adapt and regain a sense of purpose and direction in their lives — they can recover.

These same beliefs have not transferred readily to those with mental illness.

For one thing, stigma and misinformation continue to be huge barriers for individuals who have a mental illness. Many people assume that someone with a mental illness cannot work, marry, raise children or perform other normal human activities.

However, just as with physical illness, recovery from mental illness does not mean the negative effects have

disappeared or functioning has been fully restored. Recovery in mental health simply means the person is seeking to adapt as best he can to the limitations he experiences and to live his life as completely as possible.

Many mental health agencies and providers have recognized that they have not always supported important concepts of recovery.

In some ways, the old mental health systems adopted a "caretaker" approach to those with a mental illness, with the doctor or therapist largely the one responsible for planning and directing the treatment.

A system oriented to recovery has a more "partner in care" approach, with professionals collaborating with the person to discuss treatment options and how best to meet her individual goals.

Recovery components

So what does it take for a person to recover from mental illness? There are several key components.

The first thing needed is for the person to develop an acceptance of her illness. It is not necessary for the person to accept that she has a specific diagnosis, but it is important that she understands the impact of the problems on her life and how things can be better.

Second, the person needs to develop an increased sense of responsibility and control over her life. This requires the person to have knowledge about treatment and treatment options and to be seen as a full participant in her treatment planning. It's her life, after all.

Third, the person needs support in developing an increase in her hopes for recovery. A common denominator in recovery is the presence of people who

believe in and stand by the person in need of recovery — people who believe in her; even when she doesn't believe in herself.

And, the person needs the support of others in addition to her treatment team. This support can come from others in recovery as well as from family and friends. It is important that this support comes from natural sources as much as possible, in order to increase independence from the formal treatment system.

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