

Panacea

Most individuals can identify and resolve physical pain relatively quickly. A tooth ache requires a checkup at the dentist. A broken bone requires a visit to the doctor. A stubbed toe simply requires some jumping up and down until the pain dissipates. In all of these scenarios, individuals are not overly troubled with displaying pain because they understand that communicating with others is the only way to receive adequate help and treatment. Does this mean individuals are equally capable of expressing emotional or mental pain? For the most part, individuals are not taught to express, much less manage, poor mental health. Considering that the World Health Organization predicts that one in four individuals will be affected by some sort of “mental or neurological disorder at some point in their lives,” educating others about the impact of mental health becomes incredibly important (Hartl). As such, promoting mental health is a pressing need that affects society as a whole and that organizations, such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness, have been working to avidly promote and increase available treatment options. Currently, social stigma and confusion surround mental health, disrupting society’s perception and approach thereof. The World Health Organization (WHO) describes mental health as an individual's ability to recognize their potential, cope with the challenges of daily life, and “make a contribution to his or her community” (“Mental Health: Strengthening...”). However, many people have the misconception that only individuals with a mental illness have poor mental health. This increases the stigma surrounding mental health because individuals wrongfully believe emotional instability is a weakness. Nonetheless, WHO emphasizes that an absence of a mental illness does not guarantee mental health because environmental, biological, and psychological factors also have an impact. Thus, every individual is susceptible to poor mental health and understanding its causes is the first step to reducing the social stigma that surrounds poor mental health and reaching a solution. School, work, disease, prejudice, poverty, and countless other situations result in inevitable environmental factors, such as stress and anxiety, which have a widespread impact on mental health. Nonetheless, most individuals don’t

learn to manage these emotions and, conversely, learn to hide them. However, as psychologist Ackerman points out, these coping skills “are destructive and are used to avoid [an individual's] problems,” not resolve them. This in turn leads to further complications. For instance, poor mental health predominantly arises in the working population which indirectly leads to lower productivity levels and losses in the global economy equal to “\$1 trillion every year”(“Mental Health”). Furthermore, prolonged poor mental health can lead to other physical illnesses as well as an increased risk for suicide, for studies have shown that “90% of people who have died by suicide were suffering from a mental illness at the time” (“Suicide in Teens...”). Thus, promoting good mental health and providing resources for those who suffer from poor mental health is a dire need that is only exacerbated by the stress and isolation caused by the current pandemic.

In promoting good mental health, the National Alliance on Mental Illness is a leading force that raises awareness and furthers research nationwide. From its humble beginnings, an organization that began with two dedicated mothers has expanded to encompass over 600 branches nationwide. Through interactive and online resources, the organization provides a wide range of information sessions, classes and support groups that educate communities holistically (“Support and Education”). What is more, NAMI avidly funds research for new treatments, increasing an individual’s prospects to recover from what often feels like a lifelong battle. With the pandemic, the organization has doubled its efforts to bring individuals the support and help they need. For instance, information and support sessions are now online and helplines are open

any day of the week, any hour of the day. Accordingly, the organization has concentrated its efforts to raise awareness by hosting a virtual wellness month in October, the #FirstRespondersFirst initiative, and “What People with Mental Illness Want You to Know” Awareness week. With all of these programs, NAMI hopes to collectively educate communities nationwide about the “conditions and symptoms that are most misunderstood” (“Awareness

Events”). Thus, the organization has not ceased to help individuals nationwide and understands that promoting mental health has never been more important.

NAMI’s dedication to promoting mental health reduces the stigma that surrounds poor mental health and increases treatment options. NAMI emphasizes that stress and other environmental factors are inevitable and gives individuals the resources they need to manage these situations effectively. Accordingly, instead of shying away from the problem, NAMI starts a difficult but necessary conversation that addresses individuals’ mental health. This, in turn, reduces the number of people that resort to destructive coping skills, like substance and drug abuse, which might temporarily remove the pain but worsen the situation. Furthermore, people’s testimony about their struggles with mental health increases society’s willingness to address and talk about emotional and mental pain, which is necessary as the pandemic inflicts stress “that may have long-term psychological sequelae” (Le et al). Hence, NAMI’s collective efforts are important because they encourage people to address and manage poor mental health.

Ultimately, NAMI highlights that when it comes to mental health panacea, or a solution that will solve a problem in its entirety, is not the goal (“What is Panacea?”). On the contrary, their efforts show that continuous communication is the only way to achieve any form of peace, whether it’s internal peace of mind or world peace. Consequently, NAMI’s work motivates individuals worldwide and myself to not only speak out but also listen and show empathy for

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other people’s pain, whether it be physical or emotional. Overall, all of society does well to remember that “Peace comes from being able to contribute the best that we have, and all that we are, toward creating a world that supports everyone. But it is also securing the space for others to contribute the best that they have and all that they are” (“Hafsat Abiola-Costello”). **Word**

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