

Mental Health Minute

Did you know?

- 1 in 4 American adults experience a treatable mental health condition each year.
- Over 10 million people in America have bipolar disorder, and the illness affects men and women equally.
- Older individuals can benefit from the advances in psychotherapy, medication, and other treatment interventions for mental disorders enjoyed by younger adults, when these interventions are modified for age and health status.

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Facts About: Older Adults and Mental Health

By 2020, persons age 60 and older will comprise nearly 20 percent of California's total population.

It is estimated that 20 percent of people over age 55 experience mental health problems that are not a part of "normal aging." Normal aging is not characterized by mental or cognitive disorders. Mental or substance use disorders should be recognized and treated as illnesses.

An estimated 11 percent of older adults suffer from anxiety, 6.4 percent have cognitive impairments, 4.4 percent experience depression and other mood disorders, and 0.6 percent are diagnosed with schizophrenia.

It is estimated that only half of all older adults who acknowledge mental health problems actually receive treatment. This is particularly true for older adults who are racially, ethnically and culturally diverse.

Untreated mental illness in older adults can cause significant disability and increase the risk of hospitalization, institutionalization, and mortality. There are effective interventions for most mental disorders.

Depression affects more than 6.5 million of the 35 million Americans aged 65 years or older. Untreated depression is the strongest risk factor for suicide. Older adults age 65+ have the highest suicide rate of all age groups.

The National Institute of Mental Health indicates that older adults who commit suicide have visited their primary care physician close to the time of the suicide: 20 percent on the same day; 40 percent within one week; and 70 percent within one month of the suicide. These findings underscore the urgent need to improve the identification and treatment of depression and suicide risk among older adults.

Continued intellectual, social, and physical activity throughout the life cycle are important for the maintenance of mental health in late life.

Sources: California Department of Aging/State Plan on Aging 2009 – 2013; Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General; National Institute of Mental Health

Mental Health Minute: enriching lives one step at a time

The information in this newsletter is intended to be general information and should not be construed as medical advice or instruction. Readers should consult with their physician on any matter related to their individual health and well-being.