

# Notes from the Navigator

A Monthly Newsletter about Serving Customers with Disabilities in the One-Stop System



## MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

"Mind Your Health" is the national theme for May, emphasizing the link between physical health and mental health. Scientific research now shows that people with serious health conditions, such as cancer and heart disease, are more likely to develop depression or anxiety disorders. If the mental illness is not acknowledged and treated, their health ailment is likely to become more serious. Similarly, people with an untreated mental illness are more susceptible to physical illnesses such as hypertension, heart disease and infection. "We can all take positive steps to improve our overall health," stated Mental Health Association of Nassau County Executive Director Steven Greenfield. "With its increased sunshine and spring flowering, May is a great time for each of us to recommit to taking steps to improve our overall health."

### What Is Mental Illness?

A mental illness is a condition that affects a person's brain. It causes difficulties in thinking, feeling, behaving and relating to others. Research has found that biological factors, like brain chemistry and genetics, play a role in causing mental illnesses. People of all ages, races, religions, incomes and educational levels can have mental illnesses. Mental illnesses are very common. More people have mental illnesses than cancer, lung and heart diseases combined. One in every five adults and one in every five children has a diagnosable mental illness.

### How Does A Person Develop A Mental Illness?

Mental illnesses are not the result of the way a person was raised or the kind of character he or she has. The exact causes of mental illnesses are not known. Research has found that biological factors, like brain chemistry and genetics, play a role in causing mental illnesses. Stresses in a person's life can also change the way the brain works and may contribute to a mental illness.

### Is "Emotional Disturbance" The Same As "Mental Illness"?

In children, more serious behavioral or psychological problems are sometimes called emotional disturbances instead of mental illnesses. There are two main reasons for this: professionals do not like to give a child a label that has a stigma attached to it; and the signs of mental illnesses are often hard to clearly identify in children.

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The Disability Program Navigator Initiative is a collaborative effort of HempsteadWorks, VESID & Abilities, Inc.

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### What Is Stigma?

Psychiatric research reveals that society holds negative attitudes and inaccurate beliefs about people with mental illnesses, perceiving them as unattractive, dangerous, unproductive and unpredictable. Stigma frequently stems from a lack of accurate knowledge, often perpetuated by stereotyped images in the media. This often results in shame, embarrassment and discrimination, which can keep a person from seeking the treatment he or she needs to recover. Ironically, the media also offers our best hope for eradicating stigma because of its power to educate and influence public opinion.

### What Is The Outlook?

Research documents that **people who have mental illnesses can and do recover** and enjoy productive lives. Recovery can mean being able to hold down a job, go back to school, have a close relationship with family and friends, or however an individual defines it. A common theme is a feeling of responsibility for one's life and a sense of control over one's problems. The most important fact about mental illnesses is that they can be treated successfully. Today, most people recover from mental illnesses. The recovery rates for mental illnesses are as good as or better than those for many physical illnesses. For more information contact the Mental Health Association of Nassau County, 516.489.2322 or email [help@mhanc.org](mailto:help@mhanc.org). Selected Information courtesy of the MHA of Westchester County, Inc.

### Informational Websites:

#### American Psychiatric Association (APA)

[http://www.psych.org/public\\_info/mental\\_illness/what\\_is\\_mi.cfm](http://www.psych.org/public_info/mental_illness/what_is_mi.cfm)

The APA is a professional association for physicians who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders. This site gives a good explanation of what mental illnesses are. It has links to information about specific mental illnesses and their treatments.

#### National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)

[http://www.nami.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Inform\\_Yourself/About\\_Mental\\_Illness.htm](http://www.nami.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Inform_Yourself/About_Mental_Illness.htm)

NAMI is a very respected grass roots family movement that was founded in 1979. It does effective self-help and advocacy for people with mental illnesses. This site gives many facts about mental illnesses.

#### Quote of the Month:

"Never bend your head. Always hold it high. Look the world straight in the eye." ~ Helen Keller