

# The importance of mental health to physical health otherwise known as “No mental health, no health”

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# Introduction

- ▶ The World Health Organization (WHO) defines: health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The WHO went to state that there is no health without mental health. Nowhere is the relationship between mental and physical health more evident than in the area of chronic conditions. For example, poor mental health is a risk factor for chronic physical conditions.

- ▶ The human person can be described as a bio-psychosocial being who battles with various kinds of needs that are instrumental in determining his behaviour. The capacity of the central nervous system to register, store and integrate experiences in order to bring about the most effective behavioural responses to adaptation makes personality evolution possible. Inability of adaptation may result in the development of mental illness in some individuals.

- ▶ Those who have serious mental disorder have a higher risk for having chronic physical conditions and those experiencing chronic physical conditions are more likely to experience poor mental health. Mental health can therefore be described as a state of emotional, psychological, physical and social wellness as evidenced by:
  - ▶ Satisfying interpersonal relationships
  - ▶ Effective behavior and coping
  - ▶ A positive self-concept
  - ▶ Emotional stability

- ▶ However, as experts in the field, we know that differentiating between mental health and mental illness is as difficult as defining the two concepts. The general definition of mental health as a "state of well-being" which includes such characteristics as happiness, contentment, satisfaction and achievement may be difficult to apply because of fluctuations based on situations and conditions.

- ▶ Components of mental health include autonomy and independence; maximizing one's potential; tolerating life's uncertainties; having self-esteem; mastering one's environment; having a reality orientation, and being able to manage stress. This is influenced by several individual factors beginning with one's biological makeup, which includes a sense of harmony; vitality; finding meaning in life, emotional resilience or hardiness, spirituality, and a positive identity.

- ▶ According to the American Psychiatric Association (2000), mental illness is considered as a clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual and associated with distress or disability. There are three avenues for treating individuals with mental illness which are the following:

- ▶ As a matter of fact, judgment on the nature of mental health and illness is more often than not determined by cultural norms, rules, or standards of what is considered to be appropriate behavior within a given society at a particular point in time. This means that the definition of what is a healthy and an unhealthy behavior is a relative
- ▶ Nurses are in a better position to integrate mental health into general health.

- ▶ There is no way anyone can be wholly physically healthy without being mentally healthy. Mental health nursing is defined as an interpersonal process that allows the nurse to assist the individual, family, group or community promote mental health, prevent mental illness or help to cope with the experiences of mental illness and suffering. Promoting mental health and preventing mental illness are two of the major functions of the psychiatric–mental health nurse.

- ▶ According Anna Mills (2015), a counseling psychologist in Western Australia, most people understand the importance of physical health and they try their possible best to maintain this physical health. However people do not seem to recognize that their mental health is also as important to their wellbeing as their physical health.
- ▶ She continued by stating that mental health conveys to an individual and those around him a sense of well-being, self-confidence and self-esteem. Individuals can also fully enjoy and appreciate other people, enjoy day-to-day experiences and have an understanding of one's environment.

- ▶ A mentally healthy person can form positive relationships, use his innate abilities to reach his/her human potential, in dealing with life's varied challenges. Mental and physical health are therefore fundamentally linked through multiple associations between both conditions that significantly impact people's quality of life, and creates high demands on health care and other publicly funded services, that produces consequences on society.

- ▶ There is no way a person can be wholly physically healthy without being mentally healthy. A sound mind in a sound body is an old dictum emphasizing the connection between mental health and physical health. The connection between mental health and physical health cannot be under-estimated. There are established evidences showing that good physical health and good mental health are closely related.

- ▶ Brock Chisolm, the first Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), a psychiatrist introduced the notion that mental and physical health were linked. He was credited with saying that without mental health there can be no true physical health. Half a century later, there are strong evidences showing the bidirectional relationship between mental illness especially depression and anxiety and outcomes of physical health.

- ▶ It is also to be noted that patients suffering from mental illness are twice as likely to smoke cigarettes as other people, and among patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease mental illness is linked to poorer clinical outcomes. about 50% of cancer patients also suffer from a mental illness, especially depression and anxiety, therefore treating symptoms of depression in cancer patients may improve survival rate.

- ▶ **Beyond Blue**, an organization working with people with mental illness in Canada explains, how exercise is thought to block negative thoughts or distract people from daily worries, as well as alter levels of chemicals in the brain including serotonin and endorphins and so causing positive feelings. A nutritious diet is also considered to assist healthy brain functioning, and good sleep patterns improve concentration, energy levels and assists in faster recovery from illness. It is also true that poor mental health can contribute to an increased risk of developing physical illnesses.

- ▶ There are those who have shown that these illnesses can include hypertension, cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal problems, and obesity. Poor mental health can contribute to poor physical health, and poor physical health can contribute to poor mental health. What then can one do to improve or maintain good mental health that will result in good physical health? There are many things one can do to improve and maintain one's mental and physical health.

# Conclusion

- ▶ Let me conclude by repeating what I have said and what many before me have said including the first Director of the World Health Organization that there is no health without mental health. We need to explain to our colleagues in the nursing profession that their care of their patients should be based on the understanding that there can never be physical health without mental health.

- ▶ The patients and their family including the whole community should be made to understand so that it can be part of their understanding of health. Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Physical health has direct connection with mental health as has been shown in this presentation.
- ▶ Thank you for listening.

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