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The Truth About Medications

By Marcia Rose

During my 18 years of educating individuals and families about mental illness the single most difficult facet of this education is impressing upon people that medication is essential in achieving balance and managing that mental illness. Whether for a person with a mental illness or their family member, medication is often a topic that is uncomfortable.

When I share the critical nature of medication in the management of mental illness it often is apparent that some people do not agree and definitely do not believe me. For a number of years I thought this reluctance to taking medication was mostly because they didn't want to deal with side effects. I understood that reluctance since medications can indeed cause various side effects.

However not everyone who takes a medication will experience a side effect. So I began to question just what is the real obstacle here?

I then recognized there is more than one major cause for someone not to take the needed medications.

The first and foremost explanation is that the majority of individuals have not been educated about medication. This is true for mental illness medications as well as other medications. Most education about this topic simply is passed from one person to another. As with any information communicated from person to person, soon the information becomes distorted from facts and then more often to myths.

In response to this situation we must remember that the people communicating these myths are relating their own experience. Their opinion is not for the masses; it is their opinion. You are unique; no two individuals are the same. A medication prescribed for one person may cause a negative response but that does not mean it will for you.

Another obstacle is the eight-mile sheet of side effects you receive when you purchase your medication from the pharmacy. This will frighten the most educated person as well as the physician and pharmacist.

In answer to this situation you must understand the history of clinical trials for medications. During this process each individual participating in the trial is required to log frequent side effects they experience. It is required by law that all side effects be logged and distributed when the medication is available to the public. I often share with our class, if during a clinical trial you get a hang nail, it may be included on the list of side effects (laughter fills the room). It may or not actually be a side effect.

I feel the most dangerous reluctance for taking medications is being ashamed of having a mental illness. The person needing medication might fear that others will know about their mental illness and then view them as different, invisible and hopeless.

This saddens me. For years so many people have struggled with an illness not knowing what is wrong. They have watched their lives be destroyed and have blamed themselves. How disturbing that individuals view mental illness so very differently from any other illness. No one feels ashamed if they have cancer or if they are born with a genetic disease. Does anyone blame them?

I wish I could continue educating everyone on medication, I am limited in this column due to space but I invite you to come to our class. We will help you understand your illness, medications, how to manage your life and so much more.

You are not alone, we are here for you. Please take this step; you will not regret it. Also, we have cookies.

The founder and CEO of Bipolar Insights/Mental Health Educational Center, Marcia Rose, has completed her new book “Journey from Bondage to Freedom”: This story reveals Marcia's survival as well as her friendship with James, a man who has bipolar disorder.

For information, Marcia can be reached at: trust@bipolarinsights.com. Weekly classes start at 7 p.m., on Mondays at Green Valley Church, 3500 Missouri Flat Road in Room 304 in Placerville. Class is \$5 per person. Check bipolarinsights.com for complete details.

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