

Barriers coming down for those with mental illness

Mental Illness Awareness Week is October 4 through 10

by Cathy White

Often when people discuss mental illness, it is to make fun of those experiencing it. But mental illness is not a laughing matter; some students experience severe anxiety, some battle depression, and some are sitting next to you in class while hearing voices, all of which make academic success a challenge.

Juggling the demands of school, work, relationships, and living away from home can be a challenge for everyone. It should not be surprising then to hear that up to 30% of students on Canadian campuses experience some form of psychological distress.

For some, it can be the cumulative effects of too much to do and too little time to do it. Others are navigating the life of a student as a person with a mental illness.

In the past, this was often difficult, but treatments and supports today are better than ever, enabling success for many people who were previously unable to undertake university studies.

"Mark", a current student with bipolar disorder, is taking the semester off to get his medication regulated. Mark found it difficult to seek the help he needed initially, as he feared being labeled and rejected by peers.

"It takes courage to tell people what you struggle with daily," said Mark. "Life as a student with a mental illness can be very frightening... Low self esteem and fear of stigma can cause you not to achieve your potential."

Mark feels that mental health awareness is crucial, and is pleased that there are a variety of available services at UNB to help

reduce the barriers that have sometimes limited students in the past.

UNB Counselling Services commonly works with students who are dealing with depression, anxiety, relationship issues, grief, or psychosis.

The director of Counselling Services, Dr. Reg. Craft, reports that students bring a lot of life experiences with them to university.

"They may think they have dealt with certain issues, but problems may resurface in the new environment," he said.

"Stigma is still a big factor when it comes to seeking help," said Craft, but he suggests that students seek help early before problems snowball into complex issues. Counselling Services works in close conjunction with Student Health Services and Disability Services, as well as community partners like the Community Mental Health Centre and the hospital.

Disability Services on campus aim to help students overcome barriers that may be limiting their success. Sandra Latchford, the director of Disability Services, works to promote the success of students with particular needs, including mental illness.

She may negotiate with professors to have an exam written in a private area, or help students balance their academic program with the particular demands of their illness.

"Helping students to avoid becoming overwhelmed is big," she said. Some students are battling physical limitations like visual impairment or fibromyalgia, and psychological distress such as anxiety or depression, which may lead them to give up.

Disability Services can help students achieve success by working with them to develop a management strategy that bolsters the person's strengths with

available supports.

"The truth of the matter is," said Mark, "is that it is my strength to ask for help, not my weakness."

Mental Illness Awareness Week is an opportunity to learn more about how you can support individuals with mental illness. There are many resources to help with this. Try www.cmha.ca or www.caot.ca for starters.

The public is also invited to a Mental Illness Awareness night at the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital, Conference rooms 1A and 1B on Monday, Oct. 4, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Chief of Psychiatry Dr. David Addelman and some community partners will be presenting on this year's theme, Facing Mental Illness. Admission is free and refreshments will be served.

What can you do to fight the stigma attached to mental illness?

- Learn more about mental illness so you can resist inaccurate stereotypes.
- Listen to people who have experienced mental illness to learn how they would like to be viewed.
- Watch your language - many expressions, like "psycho" and "schizo" perpetuate stigma.
- Respond to stigmatizing material (such as TV ads or CD covers) yourself - don't wait for someone else to do it.
- Speak up and educate whenever you can.
- Talk openly about mental illness - the more it's hidden, the more people believe it's shameful.
- Advocate to elected representatives and work to change policies.
- Support organizations that fight stigma.
- Contribute to research related to mental illness and stigma.

Adapted from *Telling is Risky Business: Mental Health Consumers Confront Stigma* (Rutgers University Press)

Text book delays a pain, says prof

by Dan Clayden

Although fall session classes are well under way, some students are still without their textbooks.

With some classes already having midterms, this can be worrying for students and professors alike. According to Dr. Andrea Schutz, an English professor at St. Thomas University, having students without the proper texts for class can be frustrating.

"It's a big pain not knowing where people stand, or who follows what I'm trying to teach and who doesn't, especially when I teach so closely from the text," said Dr. Schutz. A handful of students in her Introduction to Literature class are still waiting on one of the required texts from the bookstore.

Dr. Steven Turner, a history professor at UNB, says that textbook delays haven't affected his teaching as much as they might have in the past.

"I've stopped using textbooks in favour of reading packages. They're cheaper, and it allows me to gear all the reading materials specifically to what I want to teach in the course. The only problem with them is that when these aren't bought, the professors have to pick up the cost. Texts can always be sent back to the publisher and refunded, but that isn't the case with these reading packages," said Dr. Turner.

One setback to the reading packages for students who buy them later rather than sooner is that they may see price increases over time, says bookstore manager Sharon Fillmore.

"We publish these course packs internally, and what has happened with respect to these reported price increases on packs that have to be reordered is that on the first of September, the bookstore entered into a new contract with Access Copyright Canada that has a higher per page fee than the one prior to it," Fillmore explained.

"This means that people who buy course packs now will be paying more because they will have been published



Meg Folkins / The Brunswickan

Students are checking the bookstore regularly to see if their important texts have arrived.

after the new contract became effective at the start of the month."

Fillmore added that students should normally expect waits no longer than a week for these course packs, or seven to ten days for textbooks (which are typically bought from publishers in Ontario). She also said that price increases in textbooks, although

occasional, are rare, so students should not expect any changes in that regard. "Even when a rise in the price of a text does occur, it has nothing to do with the bookstore changing policies. It's when the publisher raises their prices that the students end up seeing the increase - the bookstore is not seeing any added benefit."

Posters at centre of controversy

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the right to take them down."

When Boyle has inquired, he said the Public Works department has cited the number of complaints received as the grounds for passing the by-law.

Boyle said he thinks these people are far from a representative group. "A lot

of people don't like postering and voice their opinions on it. As a result, they cater to these people who dislike it."

High school and university students are the main targets for these posters, and "the 30 and under age group doesn't really call to complain about stuff," said Boyle.

"Public Works told Boyle there would

be a meeting involving him to try and resolve this issue. He can't stop people from complaining, but he can try another angle.

"We're looking at changing the arts policy to recognize postering as a viable medium of communicating ideas, expressions and voices, regardless of monetary gain."

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