

# Behavioral health services

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Mental illness refers to any condition or disease affecting the human brain that has an impact on a person's thinking, feelings, behavior, and his interaction with other people and his environment. The symptoms of mental illness vary from mild to acute, depending on the exact illness involved; however, if mental illness goes untreated, the individual affected often finds difficulty, or inability in coping with their daily activities in life (MedicineNet, 2008, para. 1).

Physical illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes are commonly easy to diagnose via a simple blood test or a diagnostic examination. This, unfortunately, is not the case with mental illnesses. The doctor would have to rely on the symptoms of the individual (e. g. how long they have been present, how severe they are, etc. ) and conduct a physiological examination to gather further information or to verify their initial diagnosis (National Institute of Mental Health, 2005).

Although mental illnesses cannot be prevented, they can be treated using medications and various forms of therapy. Deinstitutionalization The deinstitutionalization of mental health patients during the 1960s was enforced to close down the operation of state mental institutions and was first believed to be a win-win situation for everyone—the conservatives wanted to cut costs, and the liberals envisioned the freedom of the residents of these institutions whom they believe are being treated involuntarily (Failer, 2002).

However, disaster resulted from this movement. Huge numbers of obviously mentally-ill individuals materialized on the city streets. These individuals were dirty, wearing torn clothing, having hallucinations and talking to

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themselves or yelling at others, and on the whole, acting in a weird manner. Majority of the discharged patients were transferred to nursing homes, deteriorating neighborhoods, proprietary homes, and low-cost housing. The patients confined in nursing homes increased from 19-44% from 1950 to 1970 (Kramer, 1975).

Particularly affected by the nursing home conditions were the elderly who received short shrift because they were not admitted to custodial institutes and for months, they were forced to stay in acute care centers waiting for placement in cheaper and more suitable institutions. Also, a huge percentage of the discharged patients had nowhere to go because they no longer had families, or their families did not want to take them in. Deinstitutionalization resulted in the hindrance in the continued care and treatment of the mentally ill.

#### Integrated Health Care

Mental health services are integrated into primary health care services as doing otherwise implies a number of disadvantages. Without mental health providers, there would be no one to conduct diagnostic, capacity, cognitive, and personality assessments for differentiating normal body processes from adjustment reactions, medication side effects, pathology, or a blend of these problems. Also, behavioral and mental health problems would not be properly diagnosed and treated. Mental health experts are also needed as their expertise would contribute to the design, execution, and assessment of patient outcomes and team care.

Depending on the degree of illness of the mentally-ill patient, other health and social services might be needed. Some simply need a place where they would not accidentally hurt themselves. Others may just require therapy.

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Some need a place where there are people who will see to it that they are taking medication properly. Some mental illnesses are associated with physical illness, emphasizing the need for primary health care services. Some need social services such as vocational rehab, family support groups, and day care centers.