Out of the Shadows

Stigmas surrounding mental illnesses such as depression prevent countless Americans from seeking the treatment they need. But public discourse is changing.

In recent years, countless celebrities have come forward to discuss their personal struggles with mental illness: Jim Carrey, Ariana Grande, Ellen DeGeneres, Selena Gomez, Jon Hamm — the list goes on. These courageous individuals have stepped out of the shadows to help reduce the stigma associated with depression. They have acknowledged that despite their fame, fortune and success, they, like nearly 20% of Americans, have struggled with a mental health challenge.

While attitudes have gradually evolved over time, both the social stigma and self-stigma surrounding mental illness still prevent many from seeking treatment. Less than half of the adults struggling with mental illness in the U.S. get the treatment they need, and the average delay between onset and intervention is 8 to 10 years. This stigma remains particularly strong among African Americans and Latinos, who are 50% less likely to seek treatment for depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Ultimately, lack of treatment can have far-reaching effects on the overall health of those suffering in silence. A groundbreaking study published in 2006 by the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors found that people living with severe...
**Warning Signs**

Major depression is one of the most common forms of mental illness in the United States. Symptoms vary, and it can often be difficult to realize the cause. Without proper treatment, symptoms can get worse.

Common warning signs of depression include:

- Sadness, anxiety or feeling “empty”
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, guilt, worthlessness or helplessness
- Fatigue or decreased energy level
- Change in appetite
- At the extreme, thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts

If anyone you know exhibits these symptoms, encourage them to speak to their primary care provider or a behavior health specialist. The sooner depression is treated, the more successful the outcome.

**17.3 MILLION U.S. ADULTS**

had at least one major depressive episode in 2017— that’s 7.1% of all U.S. adults.

**8.7% VS. 5.3%**

A higher percentage of U.S. women than men had a major depressive episode in 2017.

**35%**

Approximate percentage of U.S. adults with major depressive episode who did not receive treatment in 2017

**44%**

Percentage who received combined care (treatment by a health professional and medication) in 2017

**15%**

Percentage who received treatment from only a health professional in 2017

**6%**

Percentage who received only medication in 2017

*The most recent year for which data is available

Sources: The National Institute of Mental Health Information Resource Center and The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Jim Laughman is president of PerformCare®, a behavioral health organization within the AmeriHealth Caritas Family of Companies.