



## **MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH**

**APRIL 25, 2019**

**Remarks by J. Clement Cicilline, MS – President**

**Presented at the Rhode Island State House**

- THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING MHA'S ANNUAL MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH KICK-OFF AS YOU JOIN WITH US IN CALLING ATTENTION TO THE SIGNAL IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH AS AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF OUR WELL-BEING. I THINK WE ALL REALIZE THAT WE DON'T HAVE A LIFE IF WE DON'T HAVE OUR MENTAL HEALTH.
- YOU HAVE HEARD US CALL OUT FOR PARITY FOR SERVICES TO PERSONS LIVING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS BECAUSE THERE SHOULD BE NO DISCRIMINATION WHEN IT COMES TO THE DELIVERY OF HEALTHCARE. SADLY ENOUGH, WE KNOW THAT THERE STILL IS DISCRIMINATION. SO, WE WILL KEEP ON MAKING THIS CALL UNTIL INSURANCE COMPANIES, POLICY MAKERS, AND THE POWERS THAT BE GET IT RIGHT!
- IT MIGHT SEEM MYSTIFYING THAT THIS PROBLEM STILL EXISTS WHEN AN INCREASING NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY RECOGNIZE THAT 1 IN 4 OF US HAS A DIAGNOSABLE MENTAL ILLNESS. WHAT OTHER DISORDER OR ILLNESS HAS SUCH A HIGH INCIDENT RATE? I AM SURE THAT YOU ARE NOT SURPRISED THAT THE ANSWER IS: NONE.



- SO, WHAT'S STOPPING US FROM RESOLVING THIS PROBLEM? I AM SURE THAT YOU HAVE A LOT OF ANSWERS. I WILL SUGGEST SOME THAT ARE MOST FAMILIAR:
  1. MONEY.... SOME FEAR THAT THE COST OF MH SERVICES IS PROHIBITIVE, WHEN, IN FACT, EARLY MH INTERVENTION GENERATES VERY FAVORABLE RESULTS THAT END UP REDUCING THE OVERALL MEDICAL COSTS OF ALL PATIENTS.
  2. ILL-INFORMED, WRONG-MINDED POLICIES THAT PREVENT ACCESS TO SERVICES BECAUSE THEY ARE MORE MONEY SAVING- BASED THAN PATIENT CARE-FOCUSED.
  3. STIGMA THAT KEEPS PATIENTS FROM TRYING TO TRAVERSE AN UNNECESSARILY COMPLEX AND SOMETIMES UNFRIENDLY BUREAUCRACY.
  4. LACK OF POLITICAL DETERMINATION TO SEE THAT THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS ARE UPHELD.
  
- JUST THIS PAST WEEKEND, G. WAYNE MILLER PUBLISHED AN EXTRAORDINARY ARTICLE IN THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL THAT DETAILED HOW STUNNINGLY DIFFICULT IT HAS BECOME FOR PEOPLE TO GET MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES. COMMUNITY PROVIDERS ARE BEING DENIED PAYMENT, WREAKING HAVOC ON CLINICAL PROGRAMS THAT PREVENT PEOPLE FROM RECEIVING CRUCIAL SERVICES. IN THE PROCESS, THE FISCAL INTEGRITY OF THESE ORGANIZATIONS HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY COMPROMISED..
  
- MENTION WAS MADE OF THE HIGH RANKING THAT THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND ONCE HELD IN THE FIELD OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES. WE WERE ACTUALLY RATED AS NUMBER ONE AND TWO ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS. OTHER STATES CAME TO SEE HOW WE WERE DOING IT.



- I CAN ATTEST TO THAT VAUNTED RANKING. I AM OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER WHEN THE DEPT OF MH, RETARDATION & HOSPITALS WAS FIRST ESTABLISHED AND THE FIRST DIRECTOR WAS ANTHONY TRAVISONO, FOLLOWED BY JOE BEVILACQUA, TOM ROMEO, DR. CHARLES GOODMAN, AND KATHRYN POWER. IN PARTICULAR, IT WAS JOE BEVILACQUA AND TOM ROMEO ALONG WITH DAN MCCARTHY, NEIL MEISLER AND DANNA MAUCH, WHO WORKED WITH COMMUNITY PROVIDERS TO LAUNCH AND IMPLEMENT DE-INSTITUTIONALIZATION IN RHODE ISLAND.
- I REMEMBER THE PROGRAMS THAT WERE PUT IN PLACE TO MOVE PEOPLE INTO COMMUNITY CARE SETTINGS. MOST SIGNIFICANTLY, THE PLAN INCLUDED MONEY FOLLOWING THE PATIENT INTO THE COMMUNITY. THIS WAS A REAL PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN STATE GOVERNMENT AND THE COMMUNITY PROVIDERS.
- BUT, WE WERE VICTIMS OF OUR OWN SUCCESS. THERE HAS BEEN A CONSISTENT REDUCTION IN STATE FUNDING YEAR AFTER YEAR. AND, NOW WE SEE THE DEVASTATING EFFECTS THIS LACK OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT HAS HAD ON THIS ONCE HERALDED SYSTEM. THIS IS TRUE FOR BOTH ADULT AND CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH. AND NOW, IT'S EVEN QUESTIONABLE WHETHER WE STILL HAVE A SYSTEM OF MH CARE ANYMORE.
- THE CURRENT SITUATION IS AN UNGODLY MESS. WE ARE SEEING THE DENIAL OF MUCH-NEEDED SERVICES WHICH ACTUALLY PUTS PEOPLE IN DANGER. WE MUST STAND UP AND WE MUST STAND TOGETHER IN SUPPORT OF THE COMMUNITY PROVIDERS WHO ARE ESSENTIALLY CARRYING OUT A STATE MAN BECAUSE IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN STATE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE CARE OF THE FRAGILE, IMPAIRED, NEEDY, AND SICK AMONG US.



- AS ADVOCATES, WE CANNOT BE QUIET AND ALLOW THIS PAYMENT PROBLEM THAT ADVERSELY AFFECTS BOTH PATIENTS AND PROVIDERS TO GO UNATTENDED ANY FURTHER. WE CONSIDER THIS A CRISIS THAT NEEDS IMMEDIATE AND APPROPRIATE INTERVENTION! OF COURSE, MHA STANDS READY TO HELP IN ANY WAY THAT WE CAN.
- SO, TODAY IS NOT SO MUCH ABOUT REMEMBERING THE GOOD, OLD DAYS....IT IS ABOUT RE-DEDICATING OURSELVES TO THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE THAT WE CARE ENOUGH ABOUT ONE ANOTHER TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT! IT'S THE HUMAN AND DECENT THING TO DO FOR PEOPLE WHO GENUINELY NEED OUR UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT.
- SO, WE ASK YOU TO JOIN US IN THIS CRUSADE FOR JUSTICE FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS. WE THINK THAT THIS IS OUR DUTY AS HUMAN BEINGS! WE HOPE YOU DO, TOO! THANK YOU.

J. CLEMENT CICILLINE, M.S.

PRESIDENT

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF RHODE ISLAND