

Stigma, access plague mental health sufferers

by Mark Pavilons

Our bodies may be our temples, but our minds are our palaces.

Our human CPU holds everything that we are, our very essence if you will.

Not only does our brain control every bodily function, but it lets us imagine, live life and, yes, escape.

It's the most important part we have, and it's a crying shame when things go wrong in our grey matter.

It's hard to say whether intellect and logic govern our actions, or whether emotions override our primary functions.

It's likely a combination of the two, a perfect balance. When that balance is off, like teetering on a balance beam, all sorts of mishaps are bound to occur.

In the last few years, there's been more of an emphasis on mental health issues in society. And rightly so. From general anxiety and depression, to debilitating mental health conditions, we're all slightly more aware, and hopefully, more compassionate and understanding.

When I was young, 'mental health' was not really a 'thing.' We had to deal with self-esteem and body issues on our own. We had to muddle through bouts of 'being down.' We kept it bottled up, most of the time.

Today, with the tremendous amount of information, data, studies and resources, there's nothing we can't investigate and delve into. Even in isolation, we can learn about various mental health concerns and perhaps learn how to cope, or try to lessen the pain.

But the numbers are still bleak and startling.

A Lumino Health/Sun Life survey finds nearly two-thirds (60%) of Canadians are currently experiencing mental health issues.

Over half (54%) of those experiencing mental health issues have not received medical support.

Affordability (25%) and embarrassment (23%) are the two top barriers Canadians say has prevented them from seeking help.

'Our nation is dealing with a mental health crisis. Whether it's a loved one, a colleague, or yourself, mental health impacts us all,' said Chris Denys, senior vice-president, Possibilities, Lumino Health. 'We must work together to tackle this emergency. From employers to individuals, we can all play a role in building a more resilient Canada.'

Anxiety (40%) tops the list of mental health concerns, followed by stress, depression and addiction.

When it comes to the likelihood of experiencing mental health issues, the Sun Life survey finds differences across groups.

Women (62%) and those aged 18 to 34 (74%) are experiencing the greatest impact of mental health issues.

Gen Z (Canadians aged 18 to 23) are more than twice as likely (16%) as the national average (7%) to say they are experiencing addiction issues.

Carl Jung, even in his day, said 1/3 of his patients suffered from a 'senselessness and emptiness of their lives.'

I'm sure we've all had a certain level of anxiety in our lives. I went through a "spell" a few years back when I lost my job. Anxiety turned into depression, and while I'm much better equipped today to deal with it, I still take medication.

We try to keep the peace in our household with our offspring. Our 20-year-old son and 15-year-old daughter tend to go out of their way to get a rise out of each other. They bicker, fight and swear. We intervene, and try to calm the nerves. But boy are they headstrong!

I give them credit for expressing themselves and being assertive, but wow, I wish they'd find some kinder, gentler adjectives!

They are good kids with good heads on their shoulders. We know there's more going on and it's hard to help them through the trials and tribulations the pandemic has brought down upon them.

Heck, it's hard for us to deal as well.

My son, the proverbial deep thinker, is troubled lately, with thoughts of the afterlife, future career, the fall semester at college, relationships. He's been bored during the lockdown. He needs to get out, go for a walk, take a drive. It may sound simple, but perhaps it could help. I'm at a loss to affect real change.

I think we have to begin tilting our heads a bit, and thinking differently. Maybe we should recognize there are 7 billion versions of "normal" on this planet.

It's never overreacting to ask for what you need, according to Amy Poehler.

An RBC Future Launch study of more than 1,800 Canadians aged 14-29 found that across every province and major city, youth are significantly less confident when it comes to their job prospects and how prepared they are for the future of work.

Currently, 7-in-10 (70%) young Canadians are learning remotely to some extent, with nearly 3-in-10 (28%) saying they are attending classes exclusively online. And 45% say that the education they are receiving online during the pandemic is doing a worse job of preparing them for their desired career.

More than half of young working Canadians have faced severe job-interruptions (reduced hours, and termination). Relatedly, almost half (47%) of those working full-time are doing so from home or at least part-time.

"Everything Is Not OK" is a new campaign that highlights the impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of children, youth and adults. The campaign calls for immediate action by all levels of government to reduce wait times for mental health and addiction services.

Our mental health is so vitally important. Without it, how can we keep up the fight, emerge from the blanket of COVID, and press on?

It takes a village. Well, many members of our village are hurting. Let's tend to them, so we can all move forward together.