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Opportunity to open new doors: Seeing one another through

By SUSAN MEAD
Guest Columnist

The Surgeon General states that 1 in 5 adults in America experience mental illness. Given enough stress and intensity, any one of us can feel overwhelmed. Who hasn't had a day that's been so seemingly difficult that you're not sure what to do with yourself? A challenging day here and there is a normal part of the human condition. But sometimes that "difficult day" can turn into weeks, months or even years.

I'm often struck by the ease in which we are able to share our physical medical concerns with friends, family and even coworkers. When it comes to talking about our mental health, however, we shy away in silence. Perhaps our parents never talked about "those issues," as the culture was to keep troubles behind closed doors. Or maybe certain events were to be kept secret due to the possible embarrassment of not having that "perfect" family. When painful experiences get "swept under the rug," we don't get the opportunity to work through them and heal.

Consider for a moment the genetic background that we all inherit. Diabetes, for example, is an illness that we may be vulnerable to because of our genetic structure. We



know that we didn't have a choice about the genes we inherited and we certainly don't blame ourselves for our hereditary traits. Instead, with the assistance of our medical provider, we take necessary steps such as medication and lifestyle changes, which help us to avoid further complications and progression of the disease.

Why not look at the mental health in the same light? Through no fault of anyone, some individuals inherit genes that can predispose them to certain mental health challenges. Thanks to increased knowledge and understanding about the human brain, researchers have been able to show us that our physical brains and our emotions are exquisitely connected. Mental health disorders are not due to some kind of character weakness, but are health conditions, the same as any other illness we may experience. So why are we so afraid to talk about this

and to get help?

It's time for more compassion and understanding. When did we move into this tough, and somewhat uncaring culture? Perhaps it's the same day we forgot to look back and hold the door for the person behind us. We all have challenges to work on as we go through the complexities of modern life. While in some instances friends and family can be a wonderful source of support, when it comes to mental health disorders, loved ones don't have the emotional distance that

is necessary for us to see ourselves clearly. This is where professional mental health treatment becomes invaluable. When symptoms are interfering with daily functioning, it's time to seek professional help.

The Chinese symbol for "crisis" is depicted with two signs: one sign represents "danger," and the other "opportunity." The premise is that there is a reason for the crisis: the danger is real, but so is the potential opportunity. If we are able to embrace this in the right light and make improved choices, it can be life changing and lifesaving, and a time when change can be most profound. When we are truly struggling, receiving professional mental health services provides an opportunity to allow new doors to open; maybe doors we didn't know existed.

I once read that if we are not willing to take care of

ourselves for at least 20 minutes a day, we can plan on spending a lot more time than that being sick. We at Greater Nashua Mental Health will leave the door open for you. It isn't about seeing through one another but seeing one another through.

Susan Mead, MA, is the Community Education & Outreach director at Greater Nashua Mental Health. She also offers training on the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders, and de-escalating techniques in times of crisis. She can be reached at 603-402-1584.

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