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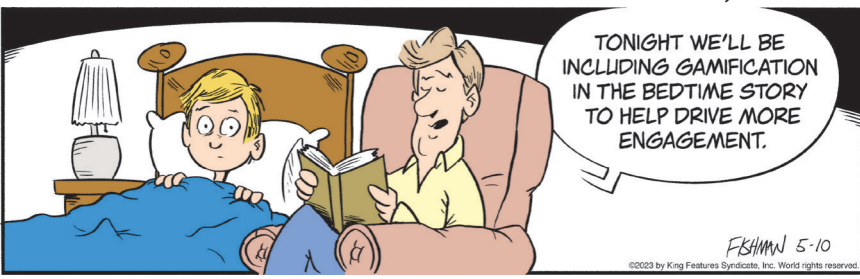
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By Loren Fishman



SUNDAY, LOCAL COMMENTARY | MONDAY, TUESDAY, THURSDAY & FRIDAY, POLITICAL OPINION | WEDNESDAY, HEALTH & WELLNESS ADVICE | SATURDAY, POSITIVE LIVING

A VIEW FROM THE VILLAGES HEALTH

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. And according to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAHMSA), 1 in 5 people experience mental illness.



**Abriana Brummett**

COMMENTARY

Mental illness includes but is not limited to, depression, anxiety, grief, substance use disorders, bipolar, schizophrenia, or suicidal ideation. The stress of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated mental health symptoms for many people. Due to the stigma sometimes attached to behavioral health, people often struggle in silence. Since 1948, The World Health Organization has defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” The Villages Health is committed to keeping people healthy and wants to encourage patients to talk to their providers

if they have any behavioral health concerns. During routine office visits, primary care providers also often ask questions regarding mood, sleep, appetite and thoughts that might signify a level of anxiety or depression. It is also important to focus on self-care, which means taking time and doing things that help improve your health, both mentally and physically. Self-care is different for everyone. It can be reading, gardening, journaling, prayer, eating well, sleeping well, crafting, playing golf or having coffee with a friend. Anything that promotes your health and happiness can be considered self-care. During Mental Health Awareness Month, it is important to recognize that mental health is just as important as physical health. In fact, they go hand in hand. A person with negative thoughts or feelings is more likely to develop physical health problems, and those with chronic physical health issues are more likely to struggle with depression or anxiety. Thanks to multiple advocacy groups and awareness campaigns, it is slowly becoming the norm


to discuss behavioral health concerns as easily as physical health concerns and receive care for both. In 2022, the new “988” crisis suicide number was established. This is an anonymous hot line with 24/7 access to speak with someone if you are in a crisis situation. The TVH Behavioral Health team also keeps a list of community groups and resources available locally. Like 96% of all counties in the U.S., Lake, Marion and Sumter counties do not have enough psychiatrists to meet the needs of those who live in these counties. So, The Villages Health has implemented an innovative approach to reduce that gap for TVH patients. Under the direction of Behavioral Health Medical Director Dr. Sheila Thomas, the TVH Behavioral Health team has partnered with TVH’s primary care providers to incorporate a Collaborative Care Model to better meet overall health needs within The Villages Health. The University of Florida Research Department has also been instrumental in promoting the Tandem Care Program uniquely for The Villages community. It is a novel team-based approach to behavioral health care. Through this program, the

department has been able to address the mental health needs of more than three times the patients that could be treated through traditional psychiatry. The program removes the most common barriers to receiving mental health care and keeps the patient in the center of care, and an active participant on the team. Each patient receives a Tandem Care Clinician trained in therapy, who communicates with the patient every one to two weeks. The primary care provider presides over the treatment team. In April 2022, integrated pain management was added to the Tandem Care service to address the impact that chronic pain can have on overall health. The team provides a comprehensive approach to keeping patients healthy. The impact has been encouraging, showing significant improvements in depression and anxiety and in blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol levels. Research shows that when patients feel better mentally, they take better care of themselves, and their overall health improves. This saves patients money by not having to go to frequent medical

appointments, urgent care visits, emergency room visits, or hospital stays. The TVH Behavioral Health Department also offers other emotional support including brief, focused therapy and group sessions (which cover how to set appropriate boundaries), caregiver support, and grief support, with more groups/classes currently in development. TVH wants to encourage anyone who is experiencing any behavioral concerns not to suffer alone. There is help. Reach out to a primary care provider, contact your insurance company for in-network behavioral health providers, contact United Way at 211 for resources, or research online for psychiatry/therapy in your area. If you, or anyone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, please call 911, go to your nearest emergency department, or call or text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988. Speak up, speak out. Mental wellness starts with you. A healthy mind plus a healthy body equals a healthy life. Abriana Brummett is a Behavioral Health Specialist at The Villages Health

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