National Mental Health Month®

Imagine your neighbor is a 30-year-old mother of two young boys. She gets sick with pneumonia and ends up needing medical treatment. You put yourself in her shoes and realize how hard it would be to have this illness while raising 2 toddlers on your own. You offer to help out any way you can—make meals, look after the boys, mow her lawn, or do her laundry.

Now, imagine the same young mother again, but instead of pneumonia, she has major depression and needs treatment. Do you still empathize with her, or do you think to yourself, *If she just thought positively, she wouldn't feel so down.* Do you still offer your support, or do you feel frustrated at her and think, *She's just being lazy and ungrateful. There are plenty of people who are much worse off than she is. She needs to buck up and push through it.*

Pneumonia and depression both have biological causes, but depression and other mental illnesses carry a sharp stigma. We don't blame people for getting sick from viruses or bacteria, but we act as though people with mental illnesses have some type of character flaw or attitude problem that led to their condition. We don't view the person with pneumonia as weak for getting treatment, but we often label the person with a mental illness as weak for seeking counseling or taking medication. We don't say to people with pneumonia that they just need to snap out of it, stop whining, smile more, or pray harder, but that's exactly what people with mental illnesses are told.

This shouldn't be the case. Mental illnesses have physiological causes, often from chemical changes in the brain. They are not the result of bad attitudes or character flaws, and they cannot be cured simply by thinking positively. There shouldn't be shame in having a mental illness—in fact, they are very common. **Nearly everyone has had some degree of mental illness at some point of their lives.** In addition, according to Mental Health America, **1 in 5 people currently has a mental illness**. That's about 43.4 million people, which is 18% of the population.

Indiana is worse off than the national average, with 20.56% of adults having some type of mental illness. Most alarming is that Indiana's youth are the most depressed adolescents in the nation. To top it all off, nearly 55% of Hoosiers and 50% of Americans nationwide diagnosed a mental illness do not get the treatment they need. It's time to change these numbers. May is **National Mental Health Month®** with a goal to raise awareness about mental health illnesses and encourage people to seek treatment.

If you have a mental illness, you should know that there are **real biological and chemical causes** for your condition. You are not weak, whiny, lazy, or crazy. And you are not alone. Talk to your doctor about how to take the first steps in treating your symptoms.

Statistics were provided by Mental Health America. For more information, follow this link:
file:///C:/Users/ctstarm/Desktop/2018%20The%20State%20of%20MH%20in%20America%20-%20FINAL.pdf