Before You Label People, Look At Their Contents

When mental illnesses are used as labels-depressed, schizophrenic, manic, or hyperactive-these labels hurt.

<u>Labels lead to stigma</u> -- a word that means branding and shame. And stigma leads to discrimination. Everyone knows why it is wrong to discriminate against people because of their race, religion, culture, or appearance. They are less aware of how people with mental illnesses are discriminated against. Although such discrimination may not always be obvious, it exists-and it hurts.

Words Can Be Poison

The stigma of mental illness is real, painful, and damaging to the lives of people with mental illness. Stigma prevents them from getting the treatment and support they need to lead healthy, normal lives.

<u>Stigma discourages people from getting help</u>. At any given time, one in four adults and one in five children experience a mental health problem. Early and appropriate services can be the best way to prevent an illness from getting worse. Many people don't seek such services because they don't want to be labeled as "mentally ill" or "crazy."

<u>Stigma keeps people from getting good jobs and advancing in the workplace</u>. Some employers are reluctant to hire people who have mental illnesses. Thanks to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), such discrimination is illegal. But it still happens!

<u>Stigma leads to fear, mistrust, and violence</u>. Even though the vast majority of people who have mental illnesses are no more violent than anyone else, the average television viewer sees three people with mental illnesses each week-and most of them are portrayed as violent. Such inaccurate portrayals lead people to fear those who have mental illnesses.

<u>Stigma results in prejudice and discrimination</u>. Many individuals try to prevent people who have mental illnesses from living in their neighborhoods.

<u>Stigma results in inadequate insurance coverage</u>. Many insurance plans do not cover mental health services to the same degree as other illnesses. When mental illnesses are covered, coverage may be limited, inappropriate, or inadequate.

Words Can Heal

Here are six steps you can follow to help end the stigma which surrounds mental illness:

- 1. Learn more. Many organizations sponsor nationwide programs about mental health and mental illness. Several are listed at the end of this brochure.
- 2. Insist on accountable media. Sometimes the media portray people who have mental illnesses inaccurately, and this makes stereotypes harder to change.
- 3. Obey the laws in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in all areas of public life, including housing, employment, and public transportation. Mental illnesses are considered a disability covered under the ADA.
- 4. Recognize and appreciate the contributions to society made by people who have mental illnesses. People who have mental illnesses are major contributors to American life-from the arts to the sciences, from medicine to entertainment to professional sports.
- 5. Treat people with the dignity and respect we all deserve. People who have mental illnesses may include your friends, your neighbors, and your family.

6. Think about the person-the contents behind the label. Avoid labeling people by their diagnosis. Instead of saying, "She's a schizophrenic," say, "She has a mental illness." Never use the term "mentally ill."

Programs to End Stigma

Many National and State groups have begun projects and campaigns to reverse stigma. These groups offer a range of programs and materials, from speakers bureaus to training programs for mental health professionals. To get involved, call them. And to learn more about mental health, call SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center at 800-789-CMHS (2647).

SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center
P.O. Box 42557
Washington, DC 20015
800-789-CMHS (2647)
http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov E-mail: info@mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/

The Anti-Stigma Project 1521 South Edgewood Street, Suite C Baltimore, MD 21227 Phone 800-704-0262, or Fax 410-646-0264

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) 730 North Franklin Street, Suite 501 Chicago, IL 60610 800-826-3632

Erasing the Stigma of Mental Illness Serving Hands International 4607 Mission Gorge Place San Diego, CA 92120 800-219-4854

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill Colonial Place Three 2107 Wilson Boulevard Suite 300 Arlington, VA 22201-3042

The National Empowerment Center 20 Ballard Road Lawrence, MA 01843 800-769-3728

The National Mental Health Association Information Center 2001 N. Beauregard Street - 12th Floor Alexandria, VA 22311 800-969-NMHA

The National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse 1211 Chestnut Street, Suite 1000 Philadelphia, PA 19107 800-553-4539