

Opening our eyes

Who cares? It depends.... by Nan Dickie

If you experience episodes of clinical depression, bi-polar disorder, anxiety or PTSD, the care and support you receive will vary from none to a lot.

Care and support encompass many aspects. There is professional support from the medical system, pharmaceuticals, therapeutic resources, nutrition courses and exercise programs, to name a few.

By “care,” I mean personal care. This includes your own care of yourself, care from family (partner, siblings, parents, children), friends (geographically close or far away), and care from other participants in a support group.

If you live in secrecy and denial with your mental issue, you are not caring for yourself. If only one other person knows of your challenge, your denial of your illness makes it very difficult for him or her to care for you. They can feel sorry for you, feel sad for you, but your denial prevents them from giving you any constructive support. It’s as if they are trying to care for a brick wall. Taken to an extreme, this denial may result in driving your friend or loved-one away.

It is totally understandable if you don’t want more than one close person to know of your difficulties. Stigma towards mental issues is still prevalent, leading one to feel isolated, with feelings of shame and guilt.

The cost of being secretive about your mental challenge is that you get stuck, and stay stuck. This is a pity. So many people find great value in belonging to a support group, and there is one in Salmon Arm that is open to anyone who lives with a mood disorder. You don’t need a referral; confidentiality is ensured; you can participate by simply listening for as many meetings as you want, thereby receiving the support and caring of others like you.

The motto of our local support group is, “We’d rather share with strangers who understand, than with friends, family and co-workers who don’t. And those who were strangers at first have become a special kind of friends.

If your response to “Who cares?” is “no one,” or “only my partner” (or some other one person), you can easily expand that number simply by joining with others in a very supportive group environment. You will be taking pressure off yourself and your friend(s) or loved-one(s) at the same time. There’s nothing to lose other than your isolation and/or your feelings of shame and guilt. That is worth a lot!

[Nan Dickie is the facilitator of a peer-led depression support group in Salmon Arm. Meetings are held the first and third Mondays at Askews Uptown community room at noon. Everyone, including supporters, welcome. Info: ndickie@telus.net; 250 832-3733.]