

Current Theories and Practice

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IM6

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I have been thinking about this module since I started the program a year ago. Not only because I knew how hard it is to cover such deep topics in one module, but because the content is very relevant to me in general. Psychiatric disorders are not something I am a stranger to nor something I refrain from discussing anymore at this point in my life. I haven't always been this way, the same as many of my peers who are nervous to speak about personal experiences; especially because we joined this profession to take care of other individuals' problems rather than our own. We were asked to speak about our personal experience with psychiatric illness, and while I know this can be an uncomfortable topic for many, I do feel that awareness for these illnesses and showing that they are not as uncommon as they may seem, is important to decrease the stigma around mental health problems in general.

I was diagnosed with PTSD and Major Depressive Disorder in the summer of 2010. I remember the day very clearly. My psychiatrist and I had been working together for several weeks, trying to work through the trauma I dealt with as a child. Learning about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in module 5, it did not surprise me that I scored extremely high on that test, basically the highest score you can get. Since my diagnosis, I have noticed that most people I speak to about my PTSD diagnosis believe that a 22-year-old female could never have such a diagnosis; that PTSD is only for men who have been to war. While it is certainly insulting, my brain scans and symptoms prove otherwise, and that is enough for me. I am grateful to have had a psychiatrist who cared enough to take my abuse seriously and could recognize the signs that I needed help. I have improved, and fully believe that I live a full and blessed life, with the help of medical professionals and therapy.

Even with my improvements, I have also experienced setbacks. Nursing school has been such a humbling yet rewarding experience, with many highs and lows. While I have always had

good grades, the instructors and my family do not see the panic attacks that sometimes precede them. It is a huge fear of mine that I will fail and disappoint the support system around me. Nursing school should not be easy; we are responsible for patient's lives and we need to be able to think critically, despite personal struggles. With psychiatrics specifically, it concerns me somewhat to learn about other psychiatric illnesses and using my past experiences to influence my nursing practice. It is hard to think about someone going through such a difficult experience and not knowing the patient's full story. How can I help a patient who is struggling when I, myself, am struggling? It has been a question I have asked myself since I applied for nursing school. When I started the program, I was concerned that I may fall into depressive episodes, constant panic attacks, and a lack of motivation. However, it was quite the opposite for me. While I have had panic attacks in the past, specifically the day of exams, I feel that my mood is overall uplifted by being productive and carrying out my dream of improving the lives of others. Setbacks for me are no longer a life-altering negative, but more of a motivating push forward.

I spent some time during the break doing an overview of the concepts covered in psychiatrics. What I realized is that no mental illness is cut and dry, there are many different ways to experience psychiatric illness and each of these patients deserve treatment aimed to their specific goals. I expect to learn in this module how to treat patients without bias, and knowing that patient's experiences can influence their decisions, as well as impact the way their brain functions and develops. I hope, as a psychiatric patient myself, to learn how to handle certain situations with a nurses' mindset, and giving the patient holistic care while protecting them and considering their feelings. One question I would ask is, what are the risks of working as a mental health nurse? As nurses, we know that our top priority is patient safety, however we must also consider our own safety. I would like to know what steps healthcare professionals can take to

stay safe around patients who may become aggressive, delusional, or experience acute spells of psychosis. Another question I would like to ask is, what is the best approach to dealing with a difficult or irrational patient? While they may not pose a threat to themselves or others, we know these patients can become agitated and likely degrade us as their caretaker. In general, we have been taught therapeutic communication, but I would like to dig deeper into that topic during this course, and be able to communicate productively with an increasingly difficult patient. My last question would be, could a nurse with a mental illness work well in such an environment? I have learned throughout this program that nurses must be flexible, and each module comes with its own set of skills we must learn. However, once we graduate, we pick our own path, and I would like to learn how nurses with acute mental health struggles thrive in areas of nursing like psychiatry. For me, I feel as with my treatment and continued therapy, I would be able to empathize with these patients and their experiences. However, there are many future nurses who deal with mental illness and I believe such an environment can be triggering for many.