Journal Assignment

Calla Beard

Covenant School of Nursing

Psychiatric illness has always been a touchy subject in my family, especially on my mother's side. Her father was always the type that believed feelings were not to be shared. He is a secretive man and believed things like "mental illness" were not to be discussed and if you had issues, you swallowed them. That posed some issues, though. He had two daughters, both sensitive. My aunt, being the oldest, suffered the brunt of his tough love. It took a toll on her in childhood and by her teens she started acting out, hanging around the wrong crowd. Long story short, she got into drugs and alcohol and due to certain circumstances, ended up with PTSD to top it off. In her mid-50s now, she has spent maybe 25 total years of her life sober. She has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder as well. My relationship with her has been a complicated one. She relapsed a few years ago and stole over $3,000 from my grandparents over a few months, they later realized. She claims to be sober now, but after everything, there is always a little doubt in the backs of our minds. After years of drug use, she acts a little spastic anyway and we've been lied to before.

There are a thousand other aspects to that story- the abuse she inflicted on her kids, the sleeping pills she still takes that change her behavior- but it's been hard for me feel much compassion for her. I know that is awful to say. I just cannot wrap my mind around the way she thinks. She will buy cokes and cigarettes before she pays her rent or buys groceries. Money has always been a struggle for her and time and time again, that burden has fallen on my grandparents and sometimes even my parents. How do you find compassion for someone who has caused so much pain and hardship? I know psychiatric illness can affect people's behaviors, but I suppose when all I have ever seen is selfishness from a person it is hard to see past the behavior itself.

I have had a different experience with my sister and her mental illness, however. In fact, it seems weird calling it a mental illness since I have never labeled it or heard her label it that before. I suppose that has something to do with the stigma behind the label itself. She, however, has struggled with anxiety most of her life and only recently discovered it. We always noticed that she worried about almost everything. It would get so bad that she would develop stomach ulcers. She even struggles with making phone calls, whether they be to strangers or close family members. With the health issues that it caused I am surprised that a doctor did not come to the diagnosis sooner. It seems this may be a common problem in the United States. She is still trying to find ways to control her anxiety, but it has proven to be a challenge since she does not have the means to treat it pharmacologically. For now, her only option is to find non-pharmacologic ways to help her anxiety.

One question I would like answered over the course of this module is how to help her treat her anxiety. Of course, this knowledge may also be applied to my nursing practice. I would also be interested to learn how the pandemic of the last year has affected psychiatric illnesses and how they are treated. I also think it would be good to learn of common misconceptions of mental illnesses that we have been exposed to through movies and tv shows.

Along with these misconceptions, I fear that my personal experience with my aunt may affect the way I view some psychiatric illnesses. I believe myself to be a compassionate, caring person. I do not want my personal issues with my aunt to affect that, especially in my nursing practice. Although I do not plan on working as a psychiatric nurse, I know that no matter what field of nursing I choose, I will encounter some sort of psychiatric illness in my patients. I realize

that it is as much an illness that needs to be treated as any virus, bacteria, or dysfunction in the

body.