

PMH Journaling Assignment

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Although mental health isn't always a hot topic for discussion, it is a topic that almost all individuals will more than likely come into contact with in their lifetime. Whether it is their own life experiences lived first person, experiences of a friend or loved one, or simply that of a brief encounter with a stranger.

It is important as nurses, that we have an open mind and even more so an open heart to those may be suffering from mental illness. It is vital that we be aware of our own biases, that way we may serve as a vessel for someone who may really need us more than we know.

My personal experiences with psychiatric illness has a long, deeply embedded history. One that started with my own grandmother. Another experience that has affected my father, my brother, as well as myself. Two of those experience I will share in this journal. Acknowledging that illness runs in my family can sometimes feel shameful. But why? Would we shame someone that has hypertension, or someone that has a genetic illness? No. We as nurses should do everything in our power to help that individual achieve their own optimum health to the best of our capability. So back to my question, why is mental illness so shameful?

The first introduction I had to psychiatric illness was as I was growing up. I never met my grandmother, but I heard many stories about her. Many of which, felt like hidden family secrets that I must keep locked up with me. My mother spoke highly of her, but not without the tailgating statements of how "sick" she was following closely behind. My mother would tell me stories of how she would go months at a time without seeing her mother because she was "visiting the institution." My grandmother was diagnosed with what I learned to be called Bipolar Disorder. I didn't know much about it at the time, aside from the stories tied to it that made her out to be this extremely fun-loving "wild woman."

As I grew older I began asking more questions. I learned that she was in and out of treatment centers most of my moms childhood. My mother told me stories of how they would have to “lock her up,” where they then performed shock treatments on her to “reset her brain.” My mother told me that at one point during her stay at the institution, she “busted out,” and fled the facility. I used to think it was funny, my rebel grandmother being a wild gal that fled the system, but it now makes me look back with extreme heaviness. I cannot help but wonder what exactly was going on with her at the time, and especially how frightened she must have been. I think about the treatments and diagnostics at the time, (which was in the 50s,) and can’t help but question if she was misdiagnosed? Was there something else going on? Something that modern medicine now could easily diagnose? These are questions that I’m aware I will never have the answers to. This is also a part of the fuel that stays with me, knowing that I want to be a part of helping people that may not be able to help themselves. Knowing that you are not your mental illness, and having the compassion to be there for those that need it the most. I want to advocate for those that fear that their mental illness is something to be ashamed of. This all starting with looking at my own mental health, and making sure I do the best to take care of it.

One of my fears is that while in the process of learning about mental health, my own PTSD will come up and get in the way of my learning and ultimate success. Although years of therapy has taught me that you have to sit with those feelings to work through them, I fear that one day a trigger will pop up and bring me to a screeching halt. For many years I had a heavy cloud looming over me, one that seemed to follow me wherever I went. Through those years of therapy, I tried so hard to uncover what was hidden within this darkness with no avail.

Speaking on my own personal trauma related to PTSD, (which is definitely something that I never had considered that I was carrying), showed up and brought me to my knees one random day. Simply being in the location that the trauma had happened, caused everything to come flooding back to my memory. As if a door that had been tightly locked for over ten years suddenly swung open with no warning. I didn't know at the time, that the mind can repress memories, especially ones that are so traumatizing, simply in an effort to protect oneself. I suppose that ten years later, my mind was finally ready to accept what had been looming in the clouds above me for all those years. Memories of sexual assault came to the forefront of my mind and were as clear as day. I remembered details that I had long shut away, and I was completely taken aback at the realization that I had been carrying this with me all these years. THIS was the cloud that was hovering over me, and I didn't even realize it. Unprocessed, repressed trauma, all unlocked by simply driving by the place that it had happened. Although I am still working through processing this trauma, it is definitely something that still hangs over me.. I never thought I was someone who had PTSD until re-living these memories.

I hope to learn in this module ways of coping with PTSD. I also hope to learn ways to be more compassionate for those that have experienced mental illness discrimination, or those who think that their mental illness is a shame. That way I may be able to recognize it and help someone else that may be experiencing it. I hope to be able to learn how to be aware of an event or trigger that I myself may carry, and not allow it to completely re-traumatize me; and also to not to re-traumatize someone else. I want to how to not allow PTSD to completely define my life, especially by hindering my learning.