

Mental and Psychiatric Health

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Module 6

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In my personal experience, mental health is very real and extremely important to overall wellness. Since working in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit as a Nurse Tech, I have seen a very different side of mental illness. Often these patients are labeled as difficult, or noncompliant. While they appear to be difficult and noncompliant, I believe these attitudes and actions are symptoms of the diagnosis itself rather than being defiant. I believe that all illness including mental and psychiatric diseases should be taken seriously. Patients should be treated like humans that have a soul, spirit, and body. They are not the sum total of their illness.

My experience with psychiatric patients has been very limited. However, this summer as a Nurse Tech, I had the privilege of caring for a young girl who was diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa. While Anorexia Nervosa is considered an eating disorder by which the patient limits food intake, resulting in low body weight and out of an intense fear of gaining weight, it profoundly impacts the individual's mental health. My sweet patient demonstrated this every time she had food placed in front of her. As she stared at her full plate of food, she was overcome with shame and guilt. Some meals it would almost prove to be too much for her as she would break down in tears rather than eat and give her body the nutrients it needed. After several talks about her biggest fear, weight gain, I was able to help her understand that food is fuel and not a ticket to obesity. She then began to eat with bravery instead of crippling fear. This is how I think we should approach any patient dealing with mental or psychiatric illness; attempt to understand where they are coming from, meet them where they are, and lead them to a place of health.

Going forward in this module, I have multiple fears. I fear I will not understand where my patients are coming from and I will not be able to help them. How do I interreact with a psychiatric patient who is experiencing a chemical imbalance? Will they be able to receive the physician's medical recommendations I am communicating and be able to think rationally? How do I deescalate patients who are not able to think clearly or who want to harm themselves? How do I know I am saying the right thing? I am concerned that I will encounter a situation where I or the patient will be harmed. I find myself to be a deeply caring person and I want to be able to equip, empower, and help every one of my patients well. When I misunderstand my patients' needs, their care suffers, and I feel as though I have failed them. I am fearful that I will make matters worse for a person who is already suffering. This feeling of fear makes me extremely cautious and slower to act on these patient's behalf.

My expectations for this module are to become more comfortable with patients who are suffering from mental illness. I hope to learn about many psychiatric diseases, their signs and symptoms, and their treatments so I am able to better serve these patients. I believe this will help me feel more confident in serving all my patients as mental health affects nearly everyone. In addition to this, I would like to know the answers to the following three questions. 1. Are in-patient hospitals really beneficial to patients? 2. How can I, as a healthcare worker, become a safe place for these patients? 3. Are patients ever at a point in their psychiatric health journey where they can no longer be helped?

I am thrilled to have the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of mental illness and the way it impacts an individual's quality of life. I hope to learn as much as I can in this module and look forward to the impact it will have on my nursing career.

