Understanding Mental Disorders

Rodney FP Dalisay, MD

Have you ever felt a significant change in your emotions, way of thinking or behavior? Has this change been there for quite a time? Has it been persistent and seemingly not getting any better? Has it affected your daily work?

Well, if so, you might be suffering from a mental disorder.

But what is mental disorder?

Mental disorder, or mental illness (as it was called in the past), refers to a wide array of mental health conditions. These range from problems that affect one's feelings, thoughts and behavior. Some of these would include (but not limited to) depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, substance abuse and a whole lot more. In my succeeding articles, I shall discuss with you these mental disorders in more detail.

It is unfortunate that there are still a lot of people who do not really understand what mental disorders are all about. This lack of understanding lead to several myths about it. Some think it is just a passing phase in a person's life. With this in mind, they think this will resolve on its own. Others think it is a weakness of will. Hence, they would advise the person with mental disorder to be strong, which is easier said than done, right?

In this age and time, it is appalling to think that there are a lot who attribute this condition to witchcraft so they would seek treatment from an '*herbolaryo*' or a quack doctor.

Given these, many people avoid talking about it. They shun from discussing the problem. They feel ashamed sharing it with others. However, mental health disorder

is a medical condition like hypertension or diabetes. Are you ashamed talking about having diabetes or hypertension? I guess not. I bet you go to your doctor for treatment without feeling prejudiced.

Since mental disorder is a medical condition, a person afflicted with it should not have second thoughts in seeking medical attention. Right?

Like diabetes and hypertension, mental disorder is a medical condition. There is nothing to be ashamed of.

Anyone can develop a mental disorder. Depending on the specific type of disorder, males can be more predisposed than females or vice versa.

The causes of mental disorder can be various. It could be inherited (genetic predisposition). Changes in the brain's architecture and neurotransmitter imbalances can also result to a mental disorder. Like your diabetes and hypertension, there is an underlying problem that needs to be addressed. High blood pressure and high sugar in the blood can be treated by medicines. So with the neurotransmitter imbalances. They are treated with medicines.

Environmental and even psychosocial factors may also lead to mental disorders. You see, a person's past and current experiences can be a cause of mental problems especially if this has made a significant negative impact on the person. The ongoing Covid 19 pandemic could be a cause why a lot are suffering from anxiety and depression nowadays. The DOH estimates that at least 3.6 million Filipinos are facing mental health issues during the pandemic, including

depression, substance use disorders such as alcohol use disorder, and mood disorders like bipolar disorder.

The signs and symptoms of mental disorder can vary from one disorder to the other. Generally, a significant change in one's behavior, thoughts and emotion may signal there is something wrong going on. Examples of signs and symptoms of mental disorder include:

- ✓ Feeling confused
- ✓ Feeling sad or desolate
- ✓ Unable to sleep well
- ✓ Changes in eating habits
- ✓ Excessive worries/fears
- ✓ Extreme mood changes
- ✓ Explosive or excessive anger
- ✓ Hearing voices or seeing things that only you can hear or see
- ✓ Thoughts or hurting yourself
- ✓ Alcohol or drug use

To diagnose the presence of a mental disorder, a doctor needs to interview the patient to gather the necessary information- when these signs and symptoms occurred, how long have these been there, what possible factors triggered it, etc. Unlike diabetes and hypertension, there are no laboratory tests that could diagnose mental disorders. Instead, a thorough clinical interview of the patient and other informants is conducted. The mental status of the patient is also assessed by the doctor to determine his current state of mind. A physical and neurological examination is also done to rule out any medical cause of the mental problem.

Based on the presented signs and symptoms, a diagnosis is reached and a treatment plan is made.

Medications are given if the doctor thinks that it is to the best interest of the patient at the time of diagnosis. Like hypertension and diabetes, medicines help

address the condition of the patient.

Discussing the problem with the patient and providing psychological support can also be done. Talking it out with your therapist can lessen the burden you are carrying.

So, in summary, mental disorders are medical conditions. Medications address the symptoms and they play a big role in preventing recurrence and worsening of the patient's condition. Psychological support aid in further improving the patient's condition.

I hope you have been enlightened on what mental disorders are all about.

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About the Author:

Dr. Rodney Dalisay is the Medical Director of Otsuka (Philippines) Pharmaceutical Inc. He is a practicing psychiatrist.