

MENTAL HEALTH:

Our search for balance

PART 2: ILLINOIS WELL-BEING PROGRAM LOOKS TO LIFT HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS



Art by Benjavisa/istockphotos.com

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH

AWARENESS MONTH and has for decades been recognized as a time to increase awareness of both mental health concerns and the resources available to improve your state of mind. It has been only in the last few years, however, that mental health has drawn the spotlight as an integral part of whole-body wellness and professional success.

Dentists and their teams must be a part of the conversation.

The American Dental Association's 2021 Dentist Health and Well-Being Survey found that 16% of dentists experienced anxiety and 13% experienced depression – more than reported headaches (12%), arthritis (10%) or ringing in the ears (9%).

In 2024, the CDS Review will explore with experts the issues around mental health: its effects, its treatments, and available resources for support.

Watch for the July/August issue when reporter Joanna Brown revisits this important issue.

By Joanna Brown

IMAGINE WALKING THROUGH an unfamiliar neighborhood after a long and lazy dinner party. As you move along the sidewalk, your pace quickens. Your head seems to pivot on a swivel, mind racing to identify the sounds and catalogue movements around you as you walk toward your destination.

Your body's natural reaction to those moments of uncertainty is normal and will help keep you safe as you move through life.

But when you experience a similar physical reaction to normal circumstances – running errands in a familiar neighborhood on a spring day, for example – that, Terry Lavery said, is cause for concern.

“When there's a persistence of these feelings, and they're interfering with everyday life or you find you're just not able to go to work, that's of concern,” said Lavery, a licensed clinical professional counselor and clinical care advocate at the Illinois Professionals Health Program (IPHP). “When that happens one day, it's probably not the end of the world. But if it persists over consecutive days, then that's something to consider.”

IPHP, www.illinoisphp.com, is a statewide program for dentists, hygienists and other healthcare professionals facing health and well-being concerns. Its programs address stress and burnout, substance abuse, and a host of other physical and emotional challenges through programs recognized by the Federation of State Physician Health Programs (FSPHP). It is the approved physician health program for Illinois.

ANXIETY

Among the IPHP's areas of expertise are anxiety disorders, the world's most common mental disorder. The World Health Organization estimates that anxiety disorders including social anxiety, panic disorder and specific phobias affect 301 million people worldwide. on.cds.org/anxiety

That's roughly 4% of the world population – nearly twice the number of people currently living in Russia.

Feelings of fear and worry, doom and danger, are intense and excessive. People with an anxiety disorder might have trouble concentrating or sleeping. They might sweat, tremble, feel nauseous, or just generally feel restless and irritable. It affects family life, interpersonal relationships and workplace performance.

301 MILLION

The number of people worldwide affected by anxiety disorders including social anxiety, panic disorder and specific phobias, according to the World Health Organization.

DEPRESSION

Anxiety is often described in tandem with depression, which affects an estimated 3.8% of the population, on.cds.org/whodepression. This includes peripartum depression, seasonal depression and bipolar disorders.

Depression is a feeling of sadness, according to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), that lasts for at least two weeks, on.cds.org/apadepression. This is what separates depression from the prolonged grief felt after the death of a loved one. People who are grieving feel sadness in waves, mixed with fond memories of happy times, and they maintain their sense of self-esteem throughout these ups and downs. A person experiencing depression feels persistently worthless, unable to experience the lift of a happy memory.

Depression may be the reason you

THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS is celebrating May as Mental Health Awareness Month with its Take a Moment campaign. “Join us in fostering open dialogues, cultivating empathy and understanding,” the organization encouraged.

But encouraging a colleague or friend to pursue mental health support can be uncomfortable.

“In a perfect world, someone wakes up and decides to seek treatment,” said Terry Lavery, clinical care advocate at the Illinois Professionals Health Program. “But we don’t live in a perfect world.”

Especially when you initiate such a conversation with a professional colleague, he recommended leading with a complement of their strengths: “You’re a very smart person and I know that you understand what’s happening in your head, but I don’t know if you can see what’s happening the way I do. It’s like a blind spot on a car.”

Call attention to the idea that the practice isn’t running as smoothly as it could, and that outside resources and coaches could improve communications among the staff; there are ways to identify the frustrations they’re feeling at home before they spill over into the workplace.

“There is still a stigma around therapy and mental health, so don’t lead with that,” Lavery said. “But you can’t play tennis on both sides of the net. At some point, you have to let the ball sit there.”

Learn more about NAMI events this month at www.nami.org.

lose interest in your regular activities or have trouble making decisions and functioning at work. Depression can change your appetite and sleep habits (either too much or too little). Depression might be the reason for suicidal thoughts.

Though anxiety and depression are two separate conditions that operate independently, Mr. Lavery said they feed off each other and may be treated similarly.

“Let’s say you are dealing with social anxiety and you are avoiding activities, that loneliness and isolation feeds depres-

sion,” he explained. “And if you start in a state of depression, the feelings that come with returning eventually to your social activities can present as anxiety.”

TREATMENT

As such, remedies and treatments for anxiety and depression sound similar. The first step is to see a physician to rule out medical causes of your symptoms, as something as common as a vitamin defi-

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ANXIETY & DEPRESSION SURVEY

From the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Anxiety

7.4% – 8.6%

Range of average monthly percentages of U.S. adults reporting symptoms of anxiety, January – December 2019.

28.2% – 37.2%

Range of average submonthly percentages of U.S. adults reporting symptoms of anxiety, April 2020 – August 2021.

Depression

5.9% – 7.5%

Range of average monthly percentages of U.S. adults reporting symptoms of depression, January – December 2019.

20.2% – 31.1%

Range of average submonthly percentages of U.S. adults reporting symptoms of depression, April 2020 – August 2021.

ciency can mimic the symptoms of depression, the APA reports.

Recommendations for self-care include exercise, a healthy diet, sufficient sleep on a regular schedule, and breathing exercises to relax your body. With professional intervention, a counselor can recommend other coping strategies, individual or group therapy, or medications to regulate your brain chemistry.

"If you can say that something good came out of COVID, it's that we're identified so many online and telehealth options for therapy and they're so readily available," Lavery said. Whether downloadable meditation apps or group therapy is right for you, Lavery compared it to buying a new pair of shoes.

"Whatever it is, it has to feel comfortable for sure, because you are going to put in some long-term work together."

Just one of myriad options greater than an app but less intense than individual therapy, Lavery called attention to the online and in-person options offered by Emotions Anonymous, found at on.cds.org/emoanon. It's a self-help group based on a 12-step program, but it is not facilitated by a counselor the way that group therapy is.

"It's about sharing the human experience and being vulnerable with others

'A fog of uncertainty'

"WE MOVE THROUGH LIFE IN A FOG of uncertainty," author and business owner John Jennings wrote on his blog The Interesting Fact of the Day (IFOD). When that uncertainty gives rise to anxiety, he calls on a six-word mantra Australian physician Claire Weekes published in 1962: Face, Accept, Float, Let Time Pass.

Jennings explained it this way:

• **Face your feelings** of anxiety and uncertainty. Acknowledge them. Don't run from them.

• **Accept what is happening** and that you are experiencing uncertainty and anxiety.

• **Float:** Let your feelings of anxiety, panic, and fear float by — observe your emotions but stay above them. Step away from your own thoughts and observe them as a third party.

• **Let Time Pass:** don't be impatient or upset that things aren't better. Just sit in your discomfort and let things play out.

"It's about owning what you feel and going through the process to do that," Jennings said. His book, *The Uncertainty Principle*, offers this as one strategy for investors facing unpredictable financial markets, but he personally called on the strategy while he was waiting for test results after a health scare.

"It doesn't solve it, but it helps to quell some of that anxiety," said Jennings, who is so proud of the work he's put into individual therapy that he pays the therapist through Venmo, labels it "Therapy" and marks it as public. "So much of uncertainty can't be resolved, but we can accept it with time, so let's train our brains to do things that are productive instead of counterproductive. I still find it challenging, but we all have to continue to do hard things."

Learn more about Jennings and his blog at on.cds.org/jennings-blog.

Loren J. Feldner Leadership Award

Submit your nomination for the Loren J. Feldner Leadership Award

The Loren J. Feldner Leadership Award is presented to a CDS member dentist who exhibits the qualities that endeared Dr. Feldner to so many: professional drive, dedication to dentistry and support to colleagues, friends and family.

The following description of leadership and leadership traits will be used as the criteria when nominating a candidate for this award:

- A leader who can motivate people to achieve a common objective.
- A mentor who others look to, learn from and thrive with.
- A leader who is proactive rather than reactive. One of Loren's favorite quotes helps to define this: "If you're not at the table, you'll be on the plate."
- A person who is visionary, confident, charismatic and inspirational.

The Loren J. Feldner Leadership Award will be presented at the CDS Installation of Officers. The award will feature an engraved statue and a \$500 donation to the Dental Lifeline Network Heroes Challenge Fund, donated in the recipient's name in honor of Dr. Feldner. It will be presented by the CDS President and the Chair of the Ethics and Special Issues Committee at the Installation of Officers ceremony in November.

Scan the QR code and submit the nomination form.

Email your completed nomination form to Lennoree Cleary at lcleary@cds.org, or print the form and mail it to Ms. Cleary's attention at: Chicago Dental Society, 401 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 200, Chicago, IL 60611.

Be sure to include the nominee's name in the subject line of your email. CDS Board officers are not eligible. **Submissions must be received by July 12.**

