

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

April showers bring May flowers. For those who are struggling with a mental health issue or have a loved one with a mental health issue, April showers are the tears we shed over not having access to the services needed to bring the May flowers of recovery.

My life has been touched by mental illness in many ways. I have dealt with my own struggles when I was overwhelmed by being expected to do more than was humanly possible in my medical training. I personally experienced the interface between mental and physical health. I have struggled as the parent of a child who was facing mental health struggles and was frustrated by my inability to find adequate resources for my own child. As a physician, I have also walked alongside patients and their families as they seek help and support.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month and for me it is important to acknowledge that those struggling with mental illness and their loved ones need to be heard and loved. They are children of God. They are often judged by others because they look or behave differently. Parents may be criticized and may fear taking their child places owing to their child's behavior. Children may be labeled as being "bad." They look and behave differently because of the way their brains work and their past experiences. They wish they didn't behave this way. I wish that I could miraculously heal them, like Jesus. Unfortunately, I can't perform miracles... and I can listen, love and value them as God's children. Jesus would do that, too.

If you are looking for resources for a child with mental health struggles, I highly recommend the AACAP (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry) Parents' Medications Guides, which cover more than medications for Anxiety, ADHD, Autism, Depression, Impairing Emotional Outbursts, and Sleep Disorders ([https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families and Youth/Family Resources/Parents Medication Guides.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Family_Resources/Parents_Medication_Guides.aspx)). The AACAP has a Families and Youth Page which also includes Facts For Families and other resources ([https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families Youth/AACAP/Families and Youth/Home.aspx?hkey=fb0befff-aae9-4867-958b-d8b45f5ecb2f](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_Youth/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Home.aspx?hkey=fb0befff-aae9-4867-958b-d8b45f5ecb2f)).

If you are looking for resources for an adult with mental illness, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) has helpful resources: <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families> . National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) is a grass roots organization that provides education and support for those experiencing mental illness and their loved ones. Ventura NAMI website is: <https://namiventura.org>

I know that it is a struggle to obtain mental health services, especially if you or your loved one is in crisis. You can call 988 if there is a mental health crisis or suicide concern that is not imminently life threatening or call 911 if it is a life threatening emergency. If you need resources in Ventura County, you can dial 211.

There is a new law in California that requires access to non-physician mental health services within **10 business days** and follow up appointments within 10 business days, if indicated by

the provider. We need to hold health plans accountable to this law. Health plans tell therapists that their panels are full or offer to pay less than it costs to provide the service, hence there is inadequate access. The California Department of Managed Health Care has the access information on their website with information on filing a grievance:

<https://www.dmhca.ca.gov/healthcareincalifornia/yourhealthcarerights/timelyaccesstocare.aspx>.

Please share this resource with your friends and family. Encourage them to let their health plan know they are aware of this new access law when they call. They can also request a case manager. Sometimes it is a struggle for a family in crisis to do one more thing... and realize that they are doing the best that they can and may be in survival mode. You can offer to help them access the services they need.

Let us advocate for mental health access so that those with mental health struggles can blossom like the May flowers.

Danielle Shaw, MD, FAAP, FAPA