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Regional Mental Health Center connects mental health with physical well-being

By Don Levinson, Regional Mental Health Board President

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Mental health care and physical well-being have largely been disconnected in the past. There is an increasing call on healthcare professionals to consider mental health when treating the physical symptoms of a condition and vice versa. Regional Mental Health Center integrates both areas for improved patient care.

Physical wellness cannot be separated from a body's mental health. Regional Mental Health Center acknowledged this and placed therapists in local health clinic several years ago. With success and improved patient care, Regional Mental Health Center applied for a grant and opened Regional Health Clinic in Hammond in 2013. Therapists and a psychiatrist are onsite for patient care. Those requiring mental health services can receive treatment and be referred to the mental health clinic if further treatment is necessary.

Patients with chronic physical conditions are at risk of developing poor mental health. Hundreds of studies demonstrate the connection.

The opportunity to address mental health issues at the health clinic is less intimidating for many patients. Walking into a health clinic doesn't have the same stigma of entering a mental health facility. When you visit Regional Health Clinic, no one will know whether you are there for an ear infection or treatment for depression and anxiety. To some, this anonymity makes the difference whether they seek help.

Statistically individuals with mental health symptoms are less likely to receive routine physical health checks. Because of Regional Mental Health's integrated approach to health care every patient's biometrics are measured during each therapy appointment. This includes blood pressure and weight. Physical health symptoms that would have otherwise gone undiagnosed are caught earlier and treated with much better success.

People with chronic mental illness die 25 years sooner than those not effected. They are at a higher risk of experiencing chronic physical conditions.

First-generation antipsychotics often cause movement disorders. Newer second generation medications don't have the same side effects, but can cause patients to gain weight. This can lead to diabetes, heart disease and other physical conditions. Integrating mental and physical health helps patients manage these issues.

Understanding the links between mind and body is the first step in developing strategies to reduce the incidence of co-existing mental and chronic health conditions. Regional Mental Health Services and Regional Health Clinic integrate mental and physical health into complete patient care. For information about Regional Mental Health Services or the Regional Health Clinic, visit <http://www.regionalmentalhealth.org/> or call 219.769.4005.