

Aldrick Monteiro Is There Anyone Out There (Part 3) 31 July 1988  
In my sixteen years experience of mental illness, I can honestly say that I am coping and coping well. If sufferers, families and doctors learn from my example, an example tried and tested over the years, they may all benefit from it. What I say is quite commonsensical when you think about it, and I have not used any technical jargon. Although incapacitated I am not totally “disabled” and have a good quality of life nevertheless.

Family support is very important to the sufferer. It is mostly the family that patients can relate to, and encouragement and understanding of that person is important. This may enable him to talk his problems out. Sharing a person’s difficulties and needs as we all know, does help.

If a sufferer has to be hospitalized well these institutions are there for the benefit of the sufferer and a respite for the families. They are necessary and vital, and they do help immensely. Just as different experts are required for different needs, so mental health institutions are built to cater for the needs of the mentally ill. The stigma attached to such places should never have happened. If one talks about a “mad person living in a nut house”, one is talking in ignorance.

Why be violent? Violence by sufferers is very little understood. A patient is violent mainly out of fear and unreasonable thinking. He is like a dog which attacks because it feels threatened, and automatically opens its jaws without thinking what it is doing. Sufferers are so insecure and fearful that their violence is a cry for help. Underneath the hard exterior is a fragile interior. These sufferers may be on the point of breaking up at any time.

Sufferers need to be kept occupied. This constant preoccupation with themselves in their minds can only be harmful to them. Work can and does act like a therapy and stops the deterioration, but it must be stressed that not all patients can work part-time or full-time. Relapses can be a result of too much office or manual work. An even balance of rest and work is the answer.

The hospital will establish the Optimum Level of the medication taken by the patient, and this must be strictly adhered to. The Optimum Level is the right level of medicine given to the patient. Not more, not less, just the right amount, which is altered if necessary on outpatient appointment visits, which must be attended. The medication contains and alleviates the destructive processes of the illness in patients, while at the same time it heals “the wounds” over a long period of time.

When ill sufferers may lose their confidence. Doubts and uncertainties are always there. Depression is all too common which can be terminal. Personal hygiene is neglected. A sufferer who is on medication may

undoubtedly put on weight. The medicine is the priority because one can live without good looks, but one cannot live without good health. Exercise is very important when taking strong medicine. A lot of walking will help the medication to work even more efficiently, and will keep the patient trim in mind and body. Too much medication and not enough exercise can only be detrimental in the long run.

Good, healthy and solid food is vital because it is good (not expensive) food, which builds the body and aids the medication to work well. Water should be drunk copiously, particularly after medication and during the day. Night drinks of Horlicks and Ovaltine will help the sufferer to sleep. Because of mental illness sufferers more often than not lose their sleep. The natural qualities of these and other bedtime drinks will help tremendously.

The sexual drive in sufferers often become limited or lost completely because of mental illness. The majority of patients never marry. Responsibilities become too great and there is a lack of motivation. Problems are magnified and seem insurmountable. Perseverance also takes a dive. Jobs cannot be held. The equilibrium which everyone desires is not there. Mental illness strips a person of his sanity, his health, his job, his social standing, dignity and way of life including any family. It isolates and condemns that person to an empty existence. Putting together a person's life after they have had a nervous breakdown is a monumental task, but it can be done.

Prayer is absolutely vital in this building up of broken nerves and a shattered mind. Make no mistake Roman Catholicism has to be made available, particularly daily Mass if possible, and Holy Communion. God must enter that person's life. Healing not only of the body but spiritual healing as well must be catered for. I am talking from experience. There is no lasting stability or progress for sufferers without the Grace of God. Mental illness destroys. Depression and despair are all too frequently associated with suicide. Medication, although it does a lot, can only do so much. The up and down feelings that patients experience can be very precarious. The lasting stability that only God can give, needs to be sought after through His Catholic Church. God is there. He knows the situation, the sufferers plight, but the humility and faith are required first before he can act.

Modern medicine today rights the wrong of mental illness. Feelings that were dead yesterday come alive today. Interest in life returns. Peace and harmony once again reign. But the necessary steps have to be taken to achieve consistent results. As a manic depressive for sixteen years, I have written about my experiences which have seen me through difficult and even

more difficult times. The proof dear friends, is in the pudding and in the eating. With the help of God and His Catholic Church, I have cooked my pudding well and eaten from the table wholeheartedly.

Having had all these years of illness and the subsequent treatment, how do I view my future? Well, I am very optimistic. I have proved to myself that in the main I will survive. God, who is the Upholder of my life, upholds my life. However, I must do my part. I must be vigilant in case I stray from the straight and narrow. Alcohol and medicine have never mixed, but so many patients turn to smoking and drinking. The medication must be taken regularly every day, and the above advice on food and exercise must be followed. Life can be hard even for a “normal” person, but for mentally ill patients, it can be even more difficult.

However, if sufferers use their common sense (not high intelligence), they may come out of their predicament with flying colours. This essay is about common sense all the way. Mental illness can be defeated. I am a living testament to an illness that from the word go, was out to destroy me. It failed. Sufferers, take your medicine, do the necessities and enjoy your life even as I do under these “abnormal” circumstances.

Show to the world that madness is not in your vocabulary, but that you are human beings with dignity and feelings like the rest of mankind. And parents, be encouraging and loving towards your sons and daughters who yes, go through hell every minute of the day because of their condition. And fight. Fight every inch of the way, morning, noon and night to alleviate the distress caused by mental illness.

Doctors shoulder a heavy burden. Trying to administer the right amount of medicine, monitoring and checking blood samples, writing out prescriptions and a thousand and one other jobs can be and is very demanding. They do their best for their patients. Theirs is a labour of love against much opposition. For the best outcome for the sufferer, patients must cooperate with the Medical Establishment because patients and doctors should work together. Without the patients there can be no knowledge gained of mental illness, and therefore no progress in alleviating suffering. And without the doctor, there is no treatment. Patients and doctors complement each other.

In Britain the treatment for illness is first class, and the drugs are exceptional. It is heartening to know that in this country at least if we are unfortunate to fall ill, we are in a position to do something about it and perhaps nip it in the bud. So many people fall ill in this day and age, and many are confused and maimed for life psychologically and physically. Jesus is there. He is waiting for each one of us. On Calvary his followers

deserted him. Are we who are ill also going to desert him in this our hour of need. Think!

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