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RECENT EVENTS

4th ANNUAL DOCUMENTARY SCREENING & EXPERT REACTION PANEL (SEPTEMBER 14, 2021) MYSTERIES OF MENTAL ILLNESS: NEW FRONTIERS

New frontiers of treatment for mental health disorders was the topic of the 4th Annual Documentary Screening co-sponsored by the Lehigh Valley Business Coalition on Healthcare (LVBCH) & Lehigh University's Healthcare Systems Engineering Program. The documentary, PBS's *Mysteries of Mental Illness – New Frontiers*, was screened in-person at the ArtsQuest Center at Steel Stacks. The screening was followed by an expert reaction panel that was simulcast to a virtual audience. The panel was moderated by Ana-Iulia Alexandrescu-Anselm, Director, Healthcare Engineering Professional Master Program, Lehigh University, and featured panelists: Cathy Kromer, Deputy Administrator, Northampton County Mental Health; Brad Moyer, EAP Clinical Director, Health Advocate; Michael Stocker, Employer Benefits Strategist, HMK Insurance.

The film focuses on cutting-edge treatments that address the latest scientific understanding of the biological underpinnings of mental illness. The film includes profiles of patients undergoing a variety of treatments, including: deep brain stimulation surgery to treat severe obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), modern electro-convulsive therapy to treat depression, and MDMA-assisted therapy to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The film also discusses how inclusion is one of the most urgent fronts on the battle against mental illness. It explores the possibility of a society more open to all kinds of minds and behavior, free from stigma and based on the understanding that mental health exists on a spectrum with each individual having the right to choose which treatment is right for them.

During the expert reaction panel, Stocker shared that for a company's mental health program to be successful, it needs to be discussed frequently. He compared treatments discussed in the film to bariatric surgery, which was developed in 1954 but took more than 40 years to become accepted. Hopefully, this will be expedited for newer mental health treatment methods. Currently, people seeking treatment coverage can expect multiple denial letters and must make several appeals for new treatments to be appealed.

Kromer said that access to care is a problem because we don't have enough providers to see those needing help. Patients in our area can expect to wait two to three months to see a psychologist, and much longer to see a psychiatrist. A lack of practitioners exists because the pay is low compared to their educational investment.

Moyer extolled the value of talk therapy for treating people with behavioral health diagnoses, especially those with PTSD and anxiety. Today, mental health professionals have a better understanding of what works because they have been measuring outcomes, while considering different variables.

60 West Broad St. • Suite 306 • Bethlehem, PA 18018 • P: 610-317-0130

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