

HEALTHY MINDS
A Weekly Column All About Mental Wellness
Elliott B. Sewell, MAE, LPCC, NCC

I am honored to be writing this column and hope that many of you will find it informative, entertaining, and above all, helpful. Let me introduce myself to those of you who don't know me. My name is Elliott Sewell and I have lived in Cumberland County since 1973. I have raised a family of three children here, all graduates of CCHS, and so I feel well integrated into the fabric of this community. I work with the elderly on a weekly basis at several locations in Burkesville, where I feel like I'm part of the family; I am the advisor to the Programs Commissioner of the Kentucky PTA, concerning child abuse issues, and I am a presenter on Shaken Baby Syndrome for Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky, a statewide organization. I co-teach two graduate classes (Group Counseling and Family Systems Therapy) at Western Kentucky University, and teach a class in Introductory Sociology at the Cookeville (TN) campus of Nashville State Community College. I recently taught at Tennessee Technological University as well.

I am a graduate of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, completed the graduate program in Sociology at New York University, studied medicine for two years in Belgium (University of Louvain) and recently received a master's degree in Mental Health Counseling at Western Kentucky University in 2006. I was certified as a National Certified Counselor by the National Board of Certified Counselors, I also hold a state license as LPCA (Licensed Professional Counselor Associate) and hope to have my LPC license as soon as this summer. I am not stating my credentials in order to toot my own horn, but simply to let you know that I am professionally qualified to write this column.

I hope to bring the readers of this paper a weekly report about issues of mental health and wellness (issues of concern to all of us) in a manner that will bring understanding to the many areas of individual and family problems that burden all of our lives.

The World Health Organization, the World Bank, and Harvard University, recently completed a huge study called the Global Burden of Disease study; it has shown us that mental illness, including suicide, is the *second* most prevalent burden of disease in the industrialized nations, including the United States.

Two out of three people who have mental disease, that could be diagnosed as such, do not seek treatment and allow themselves to suffer. These are legitimate illnesses that can respond to treatments. They are not caused by a lack of willpower or strength, or because of some moral failing, and usually will respond to treatment. Furthermore much of the treatment therapies can be talk therapy (psychotherapy), instead of drug therapy (pharmacotherapy), or a combination of both.

There are other forms of treatment that are scientifically proven by strict testing procedures (such as light therapy for a seasonal depression that many folks experience in the wintertime).

Part of mental wellness involves relationships: between husband and wife, between friends, among family members, and in work or school settings. We can be retrained to deal with situations in a way that will reduce stress and anxiety. We can learn how to deal with problem children. We can avoid behavior that hurts our relationships and ourselves. We can learn when our behaviors become abuse, and change our ways.

In the rural and small-town environment in which most of us live and work, the environment is generally less stressful for many reasons. However, there are still many stressors that bring us to our limits: economic, health, relationships, disaster, worry about safety and crime issues, drug and alcohol abuse, and even concern about the soundness of the dam that holds the huge lake back from wiping part of our county off the map. Many veterans returning from war suffer tremendously, and many go untreated. Recent studies show that this stress actually shortens their lives considerably. There is little help available here, and our government seems to ignore those in need of mental and emotional support, including and especially the elderly.

I shall endeavor to write about topics of interest to all of us; I encourage any of you that wish to address a particular situation to write to me either by email or by U.S. Mail, and I will do my best to include your topics of interest and concern. I feel there is a great need for education and help in our area, and I want to do my part with the gifts and training that I have received. Having more knowledge will show us the ways in which we can help ourselves, and when we need to seek the help of others. This is essential. I hope that this column will make a small contribution to our community, and I encourage constructive feedback, be it positive or negative.

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