

Sarah Mallard Wakefield - TTUHSC

How do you define mental illness?

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Well, I think first mental illness can be a difficult thing for people to define. And it is because there are lots of different roads to having mental health distress or what I think of as having mental health distress. So, sometimes mental illness is related to a neurotransmitter problem. So a derangement in the chemicals in your brain, whether you get that from genetics or from an exposure or a trauma, that that can really change the way that your brain releases neuro chemicals and can result in schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder. But in addition to that, really, we think about how important your environment is to helping you learn how to cope with stresses over time, and that those two can change the way your brain learns to cope with things. So there are many different patterns. Ways to having mental health distress. And so there are often also different treatments and different approaches. But what we know for sure is that there has to be a community approach. And that that's at many different levels, sometimes medications, sometimes therapy, sometimes peer support, and case management and learning new skills. So it's really important that everybody understand that there are multiple pathways to having mental health distress, and so it really requires a community effort for treatment.

What were some important things the Meadows report found?

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When our Meadows colleagues came into our community and did a comprehensive mental health needs assessment, they really identified that we have so many clinicians, so many experts in our communities doing really great work. However, there seemed to be a lack of coordinated efforts, coordination amongst those clinicians amongst those groups. We're working very hard to improve the mental health care of our citizens. And one of the recommendations was that we work together, that we talk about what we're doing and that we all come to the table, and that this will amplify our efforts and really help us work together to improve the mental health care of our citizens. The other key finding, there were many key findings. But another very key finding was the importance of early intervention, really intervening with children and families as soon as possible. There's evidence that there's at least six years sometimes up to 10 years before someone gets treatment after their first symptom. And that leaves somebody suffering for a very long time in their community that can affect school that can affect if they graduate, and how they become a productive member of their community. And so early intervention is key for helping people to adjust to whatever symptoms they're having to finding that treatment, finding that community support, and going on to become a productive member of our community.

What can these findings do for our community?

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One of my favorite things about West Texas and the Lubbock community specifically, is that we are big enough to have great experts really great clinicians and experts in many different fields. So we know the people that need to be at the table for the solutions. But also we're small enough to actually all get to the table. And I think this is a really key thing about our community. Coming together, we have the ability to make some real change, that sometimes in larger communities or smaller communities, you're

not able to affect that, that rate of change. So I'm excited for us to all come together and be a model for other communities on the solution.