Encourage discussions surrounding men’s mental health

By Greg Choy
SOUTHWEST FAMILY MEDICINE

As a healthcare professional, I’m happy to see the significant strides our community has made to understand the issues surrounding mental health. However, one area where we are still falling short is men’s mental health. Men often encounter unique challenges when it comes to discussing their struggles and their willingness to seek help.

If we want to improve the mental health wellbeing and support for all, then it’s critical we include men’s mental health in the discussion.

Mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and stress affect men just as much as women, but historically, men are less likely to seek treatment. Many men have been conditioned to “man up” and not show vulnerability and emotional expression. As a result, many men suffer in silence and avoid seeking the help they need.

It’s time for this to end.

We need to promote open conversations and encourage the men in our lives and in the community as a whole to talk more about their feelings, concerns, and experiences without fear of judgment or ridicule. Asking for help is a sign of self-awareness and strength, not a sign of weakness.

Education can play a vital role in addressing the stigma. Schools and workplaces should provide comprehensive mental health education that includes discussions about men’s mental health, signs to watch for, symptoms of common disorders, and available resources. One such resource is Mental Health First Aid (mhqfirstaid.org), a skills-based training course that teaches participants about mental health and substance use issues. By increasing awareness and knowledge, we can break down misconceptions and provide individuals with the tools to support themselves and others. As Mental Health First Aiders, individuals know the skills they need to reach out and provide initial support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use concern and help connect them to appropriate care.

Creating safe spaces for men to share their mental health struggles is another crucial step. Southwestern Family Medicine and Southwest Behavioral & Health Services offer a variety of programs and services in environments where men can connect with others facing similar challenges. These are safe places where individuals can express themselves openly, find validation, and receive support and advice from peers who understand their experiences.

In addition to receiving support and encouragement from peers, it’s important to encourage and discuss the significance of seeking professional help. Mental health professionals can provide guidance, resources, and treatment for mental health issues which can lead to early intervention, better coping strategies, and improved overall wellbeing.

It is also critical that men recognize and play a leading role in promoting and destigmatizing these important mental health conversations. If they are engaged in the planning and implementation of policies and programs that address their unique mental health needs, we can ensure that the outcomes will be impactful and effective.

I’m proud to play a part in addressing the stigma surrounding men’s mental health and we can work together to make a difference.

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Our ever evolving community

By Kat Fimmel
RECREATION CENTERS OF SUN CITY

A s our community continues to evolve, it is reasonable to expect some growing pains. We also need to be mindful that Sun City is not immune to what happens outside our walls. So, it is also reasonable, as changes continue to occur, that members will want and expect more information with greater transparency from management and the board.

The question then becomes, what constitutes transparency? There are those members who say that transparency means sharing every last detail of every aspect of the organization, with little regard to its impact. In actuality, transparency means sharing information in a way that is easy to understand, so that it is both useful and empowering. It is also part of transparency to inform members that information is either not available or is not shareable. Building contracts and employee actions are two that quickly come to mind.

Even though we have been quite transparent, and very clear in the information we provide, some members chose to believe that we are not being transparent, or alternatively we are not being “transparent enough.” For transparency to work, we have to be transparent with each other. What is the value of transparency if members opt not to listen to what is being said?

Transparency also means operating in a way that makes it easy for our members to see and understand the actions being taken. Timing is always critical in life, and in this case we are in the midst of our annual budgeting process. It allows us the opportunity to re-evaluate past decisions and re-establish a more member-friendly system; one that encourages participation of greater numbers of members.

The interim general manager outlines this new review process as follows.

“As we begin to develop the financial budget for 2024, the Budget and Finance Committee will be much more involved in setting direction for key areas, including assessment levels, key revenue and expense line items, and the capital projects to be included in next year’s budget. The committee will also develop a more systematic process for funding capital projects in the future.”

“The committee held its first meeting July 5 to discuss the 2024 budget. This is a marked change from the 2023 budget process, when the committee did not meet until October to review the proposed 2023 budget.”

“The committee will be meeting bi-weekly over the summer and fall to develop the 2024 budget. Members are encouraged to attend these meetings, 1 p.m. every other Wednesday in the Lakeview board room.”

By implementing this process, the old, more internal process, which was very short and had only a cursory review and sign-off, will evolve into a more external process that will allow for input by all interested parties. This new process will result in a budget document that will be more easily understood and provide an accurate depiction of the corporation’s finances and expenditures.

Sun Cities history has taught us that we are more effective when we stand together and represent our community as a whole. Every decision we make today should be to prepare our community for the generations to come so they too will experience self-governance and fiduciary soundness as members of our community.

Kat Fimmel is the Recreation Centers of Sun City board president.