

Health Affairs

Comment on "Beyond the Affordable Care Act" published in the August issue.

Mental Health Is Missing 10 September 2010



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This remarkably good article about determinants of health fails to mention mental health. There are several reasons why it should:

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[Re: Mental Health Is Missing](#)

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1. Mental illness is itself a health problem.
2. Mental illness is one of the major causes of disability (measured as DALYS).
3. Mental illness contributes to poor physical health, and people with co-occurring physical and mental illnesses are at higher risk of disability and premature mortality.
4. The cost of physical health care for people with co-occurring physical and mental illnesses is considerably higher than the cost of medical care for people without mental disorders.
5. As this article notes, improving health depends on personal choices about lifestyle. The article notes environmental barriers to making these choices, but it does not mention the simple fact that it's very hard for people to stop smoking, lose weight, exercise regularly, etc. There is considerable research about psycho-social interventions to help people do the right thing for themselves and for others who could be adversely affected by their behavior. In addition, some medical professionals are now using motivational interviewing to help their patients/clients to change their behavior.

Clearly, mental health issues need to be addressed as part of the overall effort to improve health.