

Inquiring Minds topic for 17 May 2013

Jack Dreyer, Moderator

Editorial: Mental health needs attention

News Press Opinion- VIEW - 03/14/13

1 **As Congress focuses on measures to control gun violence, we urge all government**
2 **leaders to focus more attention on people, specifically children, with mental disorders.**
3 **Florida ranks 49th out of 50 states in funding available for programs and treatment**
4 **devoted to mental health. This is a deplorable number and needs to change. The**
5 **message should have been delivered loud and clear to our government and community**
6 **leaders when more than 1,000 people showed up Monday at North Fort Myers**
7 **community center to express their displeasure and concern that more was not being**
8 **done to provide better access to mental health care for children. There is a huge need**
9 **for mental health care professionals — especially psychiatrists — and long term**
10 **mental health care facilities not only in Southwest Florida but throughout the state.**
11 **We appear to be focusing most of our attention on the treatment of mental disorders**
12 **and not near enough time on early diagnosis and prevention.**
13 **North Fort Myers resident Carol Spoor told the crowd at Grace Community Center**
14 **in North Fort Myers about her three grandchildren with mental health issues and**
15 **how difficult it was to find quality care. Last Sunday on the TV show “60 Minutes,”**
16 **the parents of the children who died in the Sandy Hook school massacre talked about**
17 **how early detection of mental issues is largely ignored in this country. They are right.**
18 **We applaud Congress for moving forward to control gun violence. Requiring**
19 **background checks for all weapon purchases is a good first step. If the legislation**
20 **becomes law — and we hope it does — it will at least give us a fighting chance to**
21 **identify those who have a history of mental illness and keep them from purchasing**
22 **weapons.**
23 **Mental illness can’t be ignored. This week’s meeting was more than a call for action.**
24 **It was about sounding an alarm to a serious problem. The National Institute of**
25 **Mental Health’s Epidemiologic Catchment Area study followed almost 18,000 people**
26 **and reported that 16 percent of people who are battling mental illness, such as**
27 **schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, will face a lifetime of violence.**
28 **Only 7 percent of the people identified as “normal” will face a similarly violent fate.**
29 **The study also pointed out that people without a mental disorder but who are**
30 **addicted to drugs and alcohol also were likely to become violent.**
31 **What we have to understand as a country, even more so than weighing in on the gun**
32 **debate and our Second Amendment rights, is that those with mental illnesses whose**
33 **problems go undetected or untreated can be a threat to society. Yes, more homicides**
34 **in this country are committed by people without mental illness but that is simply**
35 **because there are more of them.**
36 **Without the proper funding at the state level, mental illness among children will go**
37 **undetected. Pastor William Glover, of Mount Hermon Ministries, who was one of the**
38 **organizers of Monday’s event, had some very alarming statistics about mental illness.**

39 **He noted approximately 10 percent of the children in Lee County have a mental**
40 **health issue and, of those approximately 10,000 youth, only about 2,000 receive the**
41 **services they need.**

42 **That gap needs to close.**

43 **And closing that gap means providing more funding for early diagnosis and**
44 **prevention.**

45 **Currently most of the state's \$723 million mental health budget goes for treatment,**
46 **according to state reports.**

47 **Lee Mental Health and the Lee Memorial Health System provide most of the mental**
48 **health services in Lee. But it is not nearly enough, especially in the area of long-term**
49 **care.**

50 **Lee Mental Health served more than 12,000 people in 2011-12, the most in agency**
51 **history and double what it served five years earlier. Glover talked about the need for**
52 **one centralized agency rather than many organizations trying to deal with detection,**
53 **prevention and treatment of mental health as the best way to focus on the problem.**

54 **We agree.**

55 **Several community leaders, including county commissioners Tammy Hall and Cecil**
56 **Pendergrass, as well as Lee County Human Services, have given their support to**
57 **improving mental health care. But it can't stop with Monday's meeting. It does start**
58 **at the grass-roots level, but it will be up to our local legislative leaders to find the**
59 **funding and keep it in place.**

60 **At a time when we face significant federal cuts because of sequestration, we can't lose**
61 **sight of the fact that funding mental health programs at levels that improve care is as**
62 **important as any critical program that requires our support.**

63 **Lee is lacking in mental health care providers.**

64 **There are no long-term care facilities and that does not figure to change soon.**

65 **There also is a lack of qualified psychiatrists. LMHS has added psychiatrists with five**
66 **on staff and three with backgrounds in child and adolescent mental health. Those**
67 **numbers need to improve.**

68 **Florida Sen. Marco Rubio is co-sponsoring bipartisan legislation that does offer**
69 **funding support for mental health by expanding access to community mental health**
70 **centers, modernizing current centers and building new facilities.**

71 **The bill expands services to include 24-hour crisis care as well as support for families**
72 **dealing with mental health problems. This bill does not fix the overall problem but it**
73 **does offer hope for those trying to bring the issue front and center.**

74 **As local and national leaders debate mental health care, the reality is enough is not**
75 **being done.**

76 **Funding needs to increase and early treatment programs for children must be**
77 **developed. Newtown awakened us to a problem.**

78 **Now, we must find the answers.**



Lee Mental Health and SWFAS applaud local efforts to help improve mental health

Guest opinion: News Press 04/26/13

Kevin B. Lewis and David Winters Filed Under Horrific events such as the bombing at the Boston Marathon make your editorial [Opinion](#) “Mental health needs attention,” April 14, even more urgent. As people grapple with their own feelings about this disaster, it may lead some to seek counseling and assistance.

As providers of mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services, Lee Mental Health and Southwest Florida Addiction Services (SWFAS) have provided treatment services to more than 16,000 individuals in the last completed fiscal year.

The interfaith group that brought together more than 1,000 community members and leaders to raise concerns regarding mental health care for young people is helping to focus attention on this critical issue – one that includes early identification of young people in need, increasing resources to provide care to our young people, and working more collaboratively across our community to identify and address these needs.

We applaud this effort, believe it to be on-target, and hope it will persevere in helping make changes in our community.

- **Early identification:** If a young person has a physical ailment or broken bone, there is little or no hesitation to take him/her to a doctor who can respond to that problem. Unfortunately, history suggests that our community is much slower to respond appropriately to illnesses that include mental health or substance use disorders for a variety of reasons.

We are excited that in late June there will be nationally recognized training in our community for mental health first aid, which aims to help the public identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders. This training, using the “train the trainer” model, aims to prepare 30 individuals to provide the 12 hours of training that comprises mental health first aid.

- **Increasing resources:** Your editorial cited Florida being 49 out of 50 states in per capita state funding for mental health treatment services. Locally, Lee County has been a major funder for these services, and we hope they will continue their efforts to support services being provided. However, statewide funding is way below national “norms,” and Southwest Florida (including Lee County) has some of the lowest funding per capita on the west coast of Florida.

This is compounded by Medicaid Managed Care funding for Southwest Florida being lower than the rest of Florida – and resource limitations are quite dramatic. As providers and advocates for mental health and substance abuse issues, we hope this group and others will help resolve this issue. Without adequate resources there are limitations to what remedies can be developed.

- **Increasing collaboration:** Our community has had groups focusing on this issue prior to now, including Lee Memorial’s Community Health Visioning 2017 Steering Committee under Robbie Roepstorff’s leadership, an ad hoc group put together by Representative Heather Fitzenhagen, and now the Lee Interfaith for Empowerment group (LIFE), who are advocating for improved access to care and increasing numbers receiving treatment.

It is our hope to maximize the overlap of these efforts, and where common goals and needs are identified to use this overlap to move the system of care forward with support.

We have been meeting with several of these groups and the school system's leadership, along with Lee Memorial Health System and the Lee County chapter of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) and will continue to do so. We are working to better integrate our care with primary health care providers, and strengthen our ability to partner with other key providers. Collectively, we can change our community's response and opinion about these chronic diseases and their impact on young people and families.

- Changing business: Lee Mental Health and the Southwest Florida Addiction Services are led by volunteer boards of directors, both of which have decided to combine the two into one company in an effort to provide better care to patients and families in need.

Among the anticipated gains will be easier access to care, less confusion for individuals and families, and a common medical record for starters. We hope to finalize the creation of the new, combined company by July 1, and believe it will be a better resource for all in need.

Kevin B. Lewis is the CEO of Southwest Florida Addiction Services. David Winters is the CEO of Lee Mental Health. The two non-profit agencies are the leading behavioral healthcare providers in Southwest Florida.