

EAST OREGONIAN

JANUARY 2-3, 2016

140th Year, No. 56

WINNER OF THE 2015 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

\$1.50

Troubled minds

One in five.

That's how many adults experience mental illness each year in the United States, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

About one percent of Americans live with schizophrenia. Three percent are bipolar. Almost seven percent — 16 million of us — experienced major depression in the past year.

The numbers ratchet up for homeless and prison populations. Almost 50 percent of homeless adults staying in shelters have severe mental illness and/or substance abuse disorder. Prisons have become the largest de facto mental health institutions in the nation.

Look around your workplace, says Kimberly Lindsay. Chances are at least one or two of your co-workers are seeing a mental health professional and maybe take a psychotropic medication. Lindsay

Changing Minds

Mental Health in Eastern Oregon

heads Community Counseling Solutions, which provides mental health services for Morrow, Wheeler, Gilliam and Grant Counties.

For many of us, she said, our troubled minds are a byproduct of our frenzied lifestyles.

"We're stressed-out creatures," Lindsay said. "We aren't sleeping. We're trying to work harder and be more to everyone. We are 24/7."

Our mental health system is getting plenty of scrutiny these days, partly because of a persistent stream of mass shootings. Politicians and mental health experts argue about how to mend a mental health system that leaves some of the most vulnerable patients with nowhere to turn.

In a yearlong series on mental health, the *East Oregonian* will explore these topics and others. We will examine the costs of mental illness, look at how law enforcement deals with mental illness on the streets and what happens to mentally ill inmates in prison. We will examine the stigma of mental illness and look at mental health reforms in the works.

In Oregon, mental health has moved largely out of hospitals and into communities. We will check with experts and consumers to discover how well this change in strategy is working. We will spend some ink on prevention and early intervention.

Kevin Campbell, CEO of the Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization, is a believer in prevention as a way to improve health and cut costs. His organization teamed with others to place mental health counselors in Umatilla County schools. The embedded counselors teach mental health strategies and catch problems early. Campbell expects big dividends, especially in reducing stigma, boosting mental health and decreasing suicide rates as counselors help teens cope with stress and talk about suicide prevention.

"How predictable is puberty?" Campbell said. "Their hormones are rushing. We ought to be working with our teenagers collectively at that time."

Campbell, Lindsay and other experts will share their opinions on this subject and more. This occasional series will run the first weekend of most months during 2016.

PERS sticks with hedge funds

By HILLARY BORRUD
Capital Bureau

Oregon officials searching for ways to blunt the impact of future stock market crashes on the state's \$70 billion pension fund have increasingly looked at hedge funds as part of the solution.

The state started to buy into the funds in 2011, and now has more than \$300 million invested in them. That's a small portion — roughly 0.5 percent — of the pension fund's assets. But under its investment policy, the amount could grow. The policy calls up to 45 percent of the alternatives portfolio, or roughly 6 percent of the entire pension fund, to be invested in a category that includes hedge funds.

Pension officials are sticking with the strategy, in spite of recent critiques of pension systems' investments in the funds and the 2014 decision by the nation's largest pension fund, Calpers, to divest from hedge funds.

State Treasurer Ted Wheeler and other members of the Oregon Investment Council hope hedge funds and other

See PERS/8A



Dan Fisher talks recently to an audience in Cincinnati, Ohio, about dealing with schizophrenia and other types of mental illness.

"I cried myself to sleep. I didn't want to live, but I was too chicken to die."

— Rita Glover

Dealing with mental illness can be frightening and stigmatizing. Many of us retreat from others in order to struggle in private. Dan Fisher and Rita Glover are two overcomers who faced their demons with courage. They agreed to tell their stories to the *East Oregonian* in hopes that others wouldn't feel so alone.

Dr. Dan Fisher

At age 25, Dan Fisher lost his inner gyroscope. The Princeton-trained biochemist was blazing his way toward professional success in 1969 at the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, Maryland. The important work took Fisher's mind off his recent divorce. Suddenly, the researcher started experiencing the frightening symptoms of schizophrenia.

"I was increasingly suspicious and frightened," Fisher recalls. "I started to worry that my actions were being followed."

He believed that television shows had special messages for him alone. He stopped going to work. He quit talking — once for a month.

Over five years, Fisher did three stints in psychiatric wards, an experience that made him feel bitter and angry as he endured isolation and injections from workers who held him down.

The experience prompted him to jettison his biochemistry career for one as a psychiatrist. Dreaming of changing things for psychiatric patients, Fisher finished medical school, joined a psychiatry practice, served on the White House Commission on Mental Health and now directs the National Empowerment Center, a resource for psychiatric patients. The Massachusetts resident has spoken about recovery at several conferences in Morrow County geared for people who have experienced serious psychological illnesses, as well as their providers and families.

Fisher's rise from the ashes of mental illness is partly a story of perseverance.

"It was like being thrown into the water and not knowing how to swim," he said. "I thrashed my way back to shore aided by a deep-seated survival instinct. Later, I asked myself, 'How did I do that?'"

He attributes his recovery less to medication than to human interaction and lifestyle changes.

"Dan Fisher is the hero for millions of people out there in the U.S. and across the world for overcoming," said Kimberly Lindsay, who directs Community Counseling Solutions, which provides mental health services in Morrow, Wheeler, Gilliam and Grant Counties. "He talks about personal empowerment."

Fisher travels the country busting myths about mental illness. One of the myths Fisher dispels is that schizophrenia and certain other mental illnesses can only be controlled with medication and hospitalization. Fisher himself hasn't taken medication for more than 30 years.

"I'm not anti-medication," said Fisher. "I prescribe medication. But medication will not solve your problems, you have to solve them."

He believes early child abuse was a factor in his psychoses. That emotional connection to mental illness prompted him to create Emotional CPR, a program designed to support others through emotional crisis and into recovery.

He has noticed that less-developed countries of the world seem to have less long-term mental illness. While westerners tend to hospitalize and medicate, a person in Ghana, for example, might receive extra love and attention. He attributed his own recovery partly to a "wonderful, wonderful" therapist who infused their visits with optimism.

"He never was hopeless about me being diagnosed with schizophrenia. He was always upbeat," Fisher said. "When I walked into his office one day and said I'm going to become a psychiatrist, he said, 'I'll be at your graduation.'"

Fisher has helped others discover their own power to heal from trauma.

"But, you can't do it alone," he said. "It's a paradox. The more you want to be independent, the more you have to connect to others."

See HEALTH/8A

Two who found their way back

By KATHY ANEY ♦ *East Oregonian*



Rita Glover leans against the Family Service Center in Heppner where she provides peer support for people trying to escape the grasp of addiction and mental illness through Community Counseling Services. For Rita's story, see Page 8A.

