

BROADCAST SCRIPT-Recognizing the mind-body connection with chronic illness

People who have been diagnosed with a chronic illness often suffer in silence. Sometimes, even their closest friends and extended family don't know what they're going through.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and Dr. Sam Sears, director of physician services for OSF Behavioral Health, says it's a good time to recognize that many chronic illnesses come with a significant additional burden.

SOT-Sam Sears, MD, director of physician services for OSF Behavioral Health

“The changes of life and the deficits that come from those illnesses very frequently can wear down somebody's coping abilities and increase their risk for becoming depressed as well.” (:13)

With some diseases, depression is so common that medical providers are trained to look for it in patients who have a particular diagnosis.

SOT-Sam Sears, MD, director of physician services for OSF Behavioral Health

“We know for certain that depression is very common post-stroke. We also know that people with significant cardiac issues suffer much higher rates of depression, with the scary reality that if we're not treating the depression, the rates of having further cardiac events go up significantly as well.” (:21)

When not managed properly, diabetes can result in amputation of an extremity or loss of vision. That can restrict a person's capabilities and self-image, which leads to anxiety and depression

Lung-related issues come with unique challenges, according to Dr. Sears.

SOT-Sam Sears, MD, director of physician services for OSF Behavioral Health

“We see in folks with COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), asthma, other conditions that decrease the ability to manage good oxygenation -- you definitely have increased rates of anxiety disorders in that population.” (:17)

Most importantly, Dr. Sears says understanding the mind-body connection is important because mental health issues such as stress can cause physical symptoms and vice versa. For example, thyroid issues, including [hypothyroidism](#), can cause a set of depressive symptoms that can be resolved with proper medication to treat the condition. So, managing mental and physical health issues is equally important.

SOT-Sam Sears, MD, director of physician services for OSF Behavioral Health

Dr. Sears stresses, “Depression and anxiety are going to act like an amplifier plugged into a guitar. Is the guitar going to make sound without the amplifier? Yes. Is it going to make it nearly the level the amplifier is causing it to? No.” He adds, “So if we can unhook the amplifier, we have inherently improved that individual's quality of life.” (:22)

The key message, Dr. Sears says, is that there is help through any number of approaches, including cognitive-behavioral therapy, medication and even exercise. In some cases, a combination of approaches helps provide significant improvement in a person's outlook and coping skills.

Erin Kennedy manages the [Center for Healthy Lifestyles](#) at OSF HealthCare St. Joseph Medical Center in Bloomington. Kennedy says exercise is medicine. It can release important mood-altering endorphins, even with minimal exertion.

SOT-Erin Kennedy, manager Center for Healthy Lifestyles, OSF HealthCare St. Joseph Medical Center

“If you are making dinner, there’s no reason why you can’t side-step, you can’t march in place, and you can’t dance in your kitchen, right? Any kind of movement you’re doing -- we should never poo poo. It’s all activity. We’re burning calories. It’s getting us motivated to maybe do a little more, and it makes us feel good about who we are.” (:24)

That was the case for 63-year-old Joe Whitcomb of Bloomington. Whitcomb is a Type 2 diabetic who underwent heart bypass surgery, went to cardiac rehab and kept working out. He lost 50 pounds, got off one medication and lowered his insulin dose.

SOT-Joe Whitcomb, cardiac patient and OSF employee in Bloomington

“I turned it into part of my job. So, every day I go to work and when 3:30 hits, it’s time to sign off of the computer and sign on to the exercise bike.” (:16)

Whitcomb hasn’t had the mental health struggles others experience. For them, he offers this perspective.

SOT-Joe Whitcomb, cardiac patient and OSF employee in Bloomington

“If you sit at home and you don’t do anything, you’re gonna feel the same. (With exercise) If nothing else, you’ll feel tired, and at least you got your workout in and at least you’ll sleep better. You never feel worse after a workout.” (:15)

For those who have limited mobility, Whitcomb suggests trying chair exercises using soup cans or milk jugs. If they need an example, he advises, “There’s a Youtube video out there for everything.”

Looking for the right kind of support? An OSF Behavioral Health navigator can be reached at (309) 308-8150, and online support is available 24/7 through [OSF Silver Cloud](#).