

PATRICK MALONE THIS IS OUR DAILY BETTER HEALTHCARE NEWSLETTER FROM PATRICK MALONE

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BY THE NUMBERS
7 in 10
Number of surveyed employees with high levels of self-stigmatization over mental health or substance abuse issues who reported they missed work time due to burnout or stress
889%
Peak percentage of 14,000 people who were weighing their weight and who reported in a survey that they experienced weight-stigma from a parent, sibling or other family member, mostly during childhood and adolescence.

1. Stigmatization is the name for a major scourge in medical & mental health care
In ancient Greece, people who were regarded as shameful, disgraceful, or requiring punishment — including slaves, prisoners, and traitors — were tattooed or marked, so they would be avoided. Their body signs were called stigma, or stigmatized in the plural.
The religious recognize these terms, too, because they also have been associated (quoting an encyclopedia definition) with "bodily marks, scars, or pains corresponding to those of the crucified Jesus Christ — that is, on the hands, on the feet, near the heart, and sometimes on the head (from the crown of thorns) or shoulders and back (from carrying the cross and scourging)."

2
Number of serious, well-known conditions (monkeypox and schizophrenia) that have so much stigma attached to them that experts and advocates say changing their very names may be a necessary and beneficial option.
QUICK LINKS
Our firm's website
Read an excerpt from Patrick Malone's book.
The life you save
Nine Steps to Finding the Best Medical Care — and Avoiding the Worst

2. Where do biases come from?
Human beliefs and behaviors aren't always easy to explain, deal with or alter. When people stigmatize others due to disease or injury, however, mental health experts have research-based theories about why those with certain conditions suffer opprobrium while others do not.
In more backward times, people stigmatized the sick or injured — both inside and outside their tribal societies — not only because they were afraid and ignorant but also as a crude self-protection against outsiders' contagions and the harms that uninformed individuals believed were associated with others' injuries.

3. Stigma can cause real damage
History shows that public attitudes about diseases and injuries can change significantly — mostly for the better. Consider:
§ How backward the medical opinions towards leprosy now seem, by the late 1950s, it became a plot point in the award-winning religious-themed movie "Ben Hur."
§ How odd it would be if someone fell asleep during Ronald Reagan's presidency and remembered only the cruel, isolating, and widely held negative views about HIV/AIDS so prevalent then. The person now would be startled to see the array of Big Pharma ads splattered on broadcast TV now for prescription pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP drugs.
§ Travelers to other countries — including China, Japan, Singapore, Spain, Greece, and Italy — are finding that, slowly, longstanding practices are giving way, so that doctors inform patients with stigmatized chronic diseases like cancer that, yes, they have a serious illness. Sharing such information is not as common as it is in the United States. In this country, patients have the fundamental right to informed consent. This means they must be told clearly and fully all the important facts they need to make an intelligent decision about what treatments to have, where to get them, and from whom. In this country, the disapproving views of cancer have changed so much that important courts have held that in fact cases it is not a "loathsome disease" that damages reputations when reported. Still, doctors and patients must work harder to ensure that communication about the severity of the disease is clear to individuals and their loved ones.

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5. Words matter: Be educated, factual, and careful in thinking and talking about others
The psychiatrists' association, which campaigns against inequitable treatment of those with mental illness, shares these suggestions that also can be generalized as to how to deal with stigmatization:
"Talk openly about mental health, such as sharing on social media. Educate yourself and others — respond to misperceptions or negative comments by sharing facts and experiences. Be conscious of language — remind people that words matter. Encourage equality between physical and mental illness — draw comparisons to how they would treat someone with cancer or diabetes. Show compassion for those with mental illness. Be honest about treatment — normalize mental health treatment, just like other health care treatment. Let the media know when they are using stigmatizing language presenting stories of mental illness in a stigmatizing way. Choose empowerment over shame."

U.S. medical system struggles to eradicate array of inequities
A battle for fairness for those disabled in body and brain
To serve all an increasingly diverse and demanding U.S. population, the nation's medical care system must keep taking major steps to eliminate all manner of its existing inequities.
The system, for example, must stamp out discrimination by race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and economic standing.
Our firm's newsletter, for example, has discussed in greater detail how:
§ relentless health inequities require urgent redress for African Americans
§ it is too easy to chronicle the many unacceptable ways that women are mistreated by the medical system.
The social turmoil associated with the George Floyd protests and the 2020-21 Black Lives Matter demonstrations from coast to coast have only added to the pressure for all institutions in this country, including in health care, to undertake desperately needed reforms.

Recent Health Care Blog Posts
Here are some recent posts on our patient safety blog that might interest you:
President Biden and congressional Democrats have embarked on a major political experiment, testing the public's willingness to delay gratification in seeing big benefits of a landmark measure with important elements to improve their health and wellbeing. Is it more persuasive to regular folks that one political party is trying to tackle huge problems, or will relentless naysayers reap rewards for doing little or nothing? As a rule more than four score days remain before important midterm elections, Democrats will be seeking to convince voters of the significance of the giant Inflation Reduction Act — aka the much-reduced Build Back Better legislative package originally proposed by President Biden.
UNOS, the independent medical network responsible for procuring and distributing human organs for transplants in this country, needs big changes because it is failing desperate patients, making screening longer, aiming other mistakes, that have killed dozens, that have led hundreds to develop procedure-related diseases. The U.S. Senate Finance Committee reviewed hundreds of thousands of pages of subpoenaed documents and other material and investigated the nation's transplant network for 2½ years, assailing UNOS' for its operational and oversight toxicity, the Washington Post reported.
Patients may be reluctant to think ill of their doctors or to imagine that highly educated, rigorously trained professionals could mistreat or cause them harm. Doctors themselves know this picture is way too rosy for some of their colleagues. In a survey of 1,500 practicing MDs, all of whom voluntarily responded to an online questionnaire, Medscape — a web-based medical news source — reported this information about doctor misconduct: "Physicians tell us they're seeing more frequent incidents of other doctors acting disrespectfully towards patients or coworkers, too, casually about patient privacy, angrily or aggressively at work, and even sometimes criminally. Such behavior is still relatively uncommon, and many respondents say they are proud of the high standards of attitudes and behavior shown by fellow physicians."
When seniors need full-time institutional care, or when the injured or debilitated require similar 24/7 attention, loved ones — and even friends — must take care to read and re-read any documents that nursing homes and other long-term care facilities show before they sign during the stressful admissions process. That's because the owners and operators of the facilities soon may create a financial nightmare for the unwitting document signers, feeling what is the huge shame of the U.S. health care system: medical debt. Most regular folks might think that the financial obligations incurred in long-term care facilities rightly belong to the adult residents. They're 21 and older, and unlike minor kids carted into urgent, or emergency rooms for treatment, the residents typically have, until their situations suddenly shift, been responsible, including legally, for their lives and personal business. But nursing homes have dragged into court "children, grandchildren, neighbors, and others, many with nearly no financial ties to residents or legal responsibility for their debts," the independent Kaiser Health News service and NPR have reported.
Is it time for a glimmer of optimism about reducing at least one unacceptably high health care cost? Say hear, hear then, to the federal Food and Drug Administration's removing the last regulatory block to consumers with mild to moderate hearing loss buying cheaper, easier to access, over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids — potentially as soon as this fall. Hearing some fading Bronx cheers? Those may be for the regulators who plodded to potentially benefit tens of millions of folks, who were forking over \$5,000 for pairs of medically prescribed devices that previously also required expensive attention of doctors and audiologists. Patients also were ripped for the costs of this care, which typically was not covered by traditional insurance or Medicare.

HERE'S TO A HEALTHY (REST OF) 2022!
Sincerely,
Patrick Malone
Patrick Malone & Associates
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