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Getting accurate and valid health information is crucial to preventing and treating a number of health conditions, including mental health disorders. As colleges and universities begin welcoming new and returning students this month, the focus is on mental health resources for our young adult population. Mental health is not always easy to talk about and often information is gathered anonymously, online. Exploring new initiatives that raise awareness about mental health, as well as resources that are available locally, aids in decreasing the stigma and ensuring quality care.



Project Semicolon

So what does a punctuation mark have to do with mental health? For Amy Bleuel, the semicolon is a perfect symbol for dealing with the struggles of mental illness, addiction, and recovery. It represents a decision to make life-affirming choices.

Amy lost her father to suicide in 2003, and she has had her own personal struggles with mental illness, self-injury, addiction, and suicide. She began Project Semicolon in 2013, to honor the memory of her father and provide inspiration for those who fight a daily battle to be stable, sober, and strong.

media sites show drawn or tattooed semicolons, often on the wrist. The mark is sometimes embellished with a butterfly, flower, or a closed fist to represent solidarity and support. Some include inspirational sayings, such as "My Story Isn't Over" or "Keep Growing."

In an interview with USA Today, Bleuel explains, "I wanted to tell my story to inspire others to tell their story. I wanted to start a conversation that can't be stopped, a conversation about mental illness and suicide so we can address it and lower [suicide] rates."²



In comments posted on the USA Today web site, some people object to the faith-based nature of the original project or feel it will be a passing fad. However, others posting disagree and believe the semicolon has become a larger symbol, "reminding those that struggle to pause and keep going, show of support for loved ones, and ... raise awareness for mental health issues."²

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In grammar, a period ends a sentence. Period. A semicolon allows the sentence to continue; it connects thoughts, ideas, and experiences. For Project Semicolon, the symbol connects people in mutual support and hope.

According to the Project Semicolon web site, "A semicolon is used when an author could have chosen to end their sentence, but chose not to. The author is you and the sentence is your life."¹

The mission of the project is to raise public awareness about depression, addiction, self-injury and suicide. The semicolon symbol also represents a goal: "to believe that this is not the end but a new beginning."¹

Images on the Project Semicolon web site and social

Check out the MHA's recently revamped web site!

<http://www.mhacortland.com/>



Young Adults, Mental Health, and Online Information

Adapted from the E-fact Sheet, "Facts About Young Adults, Mental Health, and Online Information-Seeking," Pathways to Positive Futures, <http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/>¹

The General Quality of Online Mental Health Information is Poor

- Several studies indicate that the overall quality of online information about social phobia, substance addictions, and other mental health disorders is low.^{4,5}
- A review of 21 popular websites about treatment for depression found the quality of information was poor.⁴
- Few health-related websites display the source and date, along with other information quality indicators.⁶
- Young people feel overwhelmed by the amount of health information available online, and they report not being able to find answers to their specific questions, or information tailored to their needs.⁷
- However, the majority (72%) of health seekers say you *can* believe all or most of the health information online.³



Our Findings:

Out of 27 young adults with serious mental health conditions, most (85%) had looked up mental health information online—almost half (44%) do so at least once a month.

Most Young Adults Use the Internet to Find Health Information

- In 2008, 72% of young adults 18-29 looked for health information online.¹
- 52% looked for information about a specific medical treatment or procedure online.¹
- 49% of 18-29 year olds research doctors and other health professionals online.²
- 38% look up information on prescription or over the counter drugs.²
- 34% look up alternative treatments or medicines.²

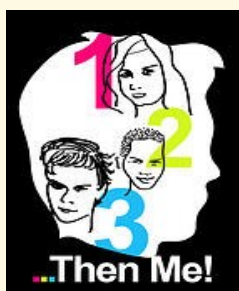
Young Adults Use the Internet to Search for Mental Health Information

- 33% of 18-29 year olds said they looked for mental health information online.²

People Use the Internet to Guide Their Health Decisions

- 68% of health information seekers state that the information they find online has an impact on their healthcare decisions.³
- 18% of adults say they have gone online to diagnose or treat a medical condition on their own, without consulting their doctor.³
- About half of adult online health information seekers have read someone else's commentary or experience about health or medical issues on an online news group, website, or blog.²

¹ <http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/> "Facts About Young Adults, Mental Health, and Online Information-Seeking," L. Kris Gowen & Matthew Deschaine, eHealth Project, Research and Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures, Portland State University, Portland, OR. Project funded by National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research, US Dept. of Education, and the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, US Dept. of Health and Human Services.



In order to combat stigma and increase help-seeking behaviors, Seven Valleys Health Coalition collaborated with Cortland's Think Again Group (TAG), and Thoughtwerks Productions on the 1, 2, 3... Then Me! Film Project. Funding for the project was through a grant awarded by the Mental Health Foundation.

The film fuses documentary footage of young adults sharing their stories with a dramatized narrative about four teens competing for first prize in a health fair. In an eye-opening twist, the characters focus their project on mental illness, all the while unaware that one of their own is experiencing the symptoms of an anxiety disorder.

Ashley Jones, a co-creator of the project, said, "Producing 1, 2, 3... Then Me! Has been an amazing experience. I am constantly blown away by the community support surrounding the project. Mental illness is a condition just like any other physical illness. It is prevalent and it is treatable - we want this film to demonstrate that to young people in our community. When people think about mental illness, we want them not to think about stigma, but about identification, empowerment, and hope."

Learn more about the project and access additional resources at www.123thenme.org.



Project Semicolon, continued from page 1 ...

The Project's web address is <http://www.projectsemicolon.com/>. There is a large following on social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest. Frequent Twitter hashtags are: [#ProjectSemicolon](#) [#SemicolonProject416](#) [#Semicolon](#) [#TheSemicolonProject](#) [#SemicolonProject](#).

The vision is that together we can achieve lower suicide rates in the US and around the world;
That together we can start a conversation about suicide, mental illness and addiction that can't be stopped;
We envision love and hope and we declare that hope is alive;
From the Project Semicolon Vision Statement

Joan Martin, Project Coordinator, Seven Valleys Health Coalition

¹ <http://www.projectsemicolon.com/>

² <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2015/07/09/semicolon-tattoo-mental-health/29904291/>



Many students have mental health concerns, feel stressed, or maybe just need someone to talk to. Colleges have Counseling Centers to assist students in a variety of ways.

Counseling is a confidential relationship with a person who is professionally trained to help you discuss your concerns. The counseling staff assists students with a wide range of personal, academic, and career issues.



Contacting your Counseling Center:

- **Tompkins Cortland Community College** Counseling Center, call 607-844-8222 ext. 4261
- **SUNY Cortland**, call 607-753-4728

Thoughts from current SUNY students:

"Getting enough sleep also helps with my emotional wellness. College can be very stressful and overwhelming at times, but to be tired on top of all that would just make things worse."

"I often become very overwhelmed here with balancing all aspects of college life so I would like to become calmer and have less anxiety attacks."

EMAIL OPTION:

If you'd like to receive the MHA Newsletter electronically **in color** as a PDF, please send your full name and email to: jmartin@sevenvalleyshealth.org

Addressee

Questions, comments, or feedback on the MHA Newsletter? Let us know! Email jmartin@sevenvalleyshealth.org We appreciate your thoughts!

Community Events & Support Groups

Parents & Change Support Group

This support group is for parents and caregivers of children, teens, and adults with mental health conditions. Meetings are from 6:00pm to 7:30pm at 90 Central Avenue in Cortland. For more information, please contact Beckey Tripp at parentsandchange@yahoo.com.

2015 Meetings:



August 17 September 21
October 19 November 23
December 21

SAVE THE DATE: Suicide Prevention Walk & Information Fair Thursday, September 10th



4 - 6 pm, County Office Building Gym, 60 Central Ave.

Resource table opportunities available for local agencies. Contact Shelley Smith for more info or to RSVP: 607-423-7472 or ssmith@ccocc.org

Survivors Of a Loved One's Suicide (SOLOS) Support Group



Come join us in a safe, comfortable environment to talk about your lost loved one(s). Meetings are held the first Thursday of every month from 5:30 pm - 7:00 pm. For more info please contact Family Counseling Services at 607-753-0234.



If you have an upcoming community event you would like considered for admission to the MHA Newsletter, send your announcement to jmartin@sevenvalleyshealth.org.

Disclaimer: The information presented here does not constitute professional medical advice. Individuals respond to treatment for mental health conditions in different ways, and treatment plans often need adjustment over time. Patients should work closely with their doctor and other health professionals in order to achieve optimal control of symptoms.