



Dear Community Member,

In speaking about the stigma attached to mental illness, former President George Bush once said, "Americans must understand and send this message: mental disability is not a scandal—it is an illness. And like physical illness, it is treatable, especially when the treatment comes early."

Although we've come a long way since the days of institutionalization and separation from community, the stigma and bias associated with mental illness are still strong today. And there continue to be negative consequences, not only for those who are working toward their recovery, but also for those who desperately need to seek help but are afraid to do so.

Reducing the stigma and bias against those facing mental health challenges is a tall order, but it can be done—and efforts to increase public awareness and understanding of mental illness are important steps in the right direction.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and at Magellan we plan to celebrate it through outreach and education, communication and interaction. Magellan is partnering with NAMI Arizona, Family Involvement Center, and the Mental Health Awareness Coalition to highlight "Extraordinary People"—individuals who make valuable contributions to our community despite challenges with mental illness or substance abuse.

Through town hall meetings, presentations and other outreach efforts, we will target advocates, public policy makers and community decision makers as well as the general public. As these groups are introduced to our "Extraordinary People," we believe they will begin to see these individuals as the ordinary people they are—just like you and me—who have shown extraordinary determination to overcome their mental health challenges and achieve a fulfilling life in the community, a rewarding job and loving relationships with family and friends.

To learn more about our "Extraordinary People" and the activities surrounding Mental Health Awareness Month, please visit www.OneinFour.info (or www.UnoenCuatro.info in Spanish).

In addition to raising awareness in May, we are also focusing on communications of another kind. Budget cuts are mandating the transition of individuals with serious mental illness who are ineligible for AHCCCS (Medicaid) to a much reduced level of benefits. To do this, we are implementing a phased transition plan that calls for rescreening of all individuals for AHCCCS eligibility and multiple "high-touch" interactions with every affected service recipient. This process will ensure that those affected by the budget cuts thoroughly understand the reductions to their benefits, when and why these cuts are happening, and what community resources may be available to them after the cuts take effect on July 1, 2010.

While changes of this magnitude are difficult, our focus remains undeterred—to help people achieve recovery and lead satisfying and productive lives. Whether that's by working to reduce stigma, promoting mind and body wellness, developing proactive crisis plans or training mental health workers to recognize and address suicidal intentions, we are committed to delivering positive, meaningful outcomes for those we serve.

But we can't achieve this goal alone. I invite you to join Magellan and our partners in tearing down the walls of stigma, not just during Mental Health Awareness Month, but all year long.

As Paul Lee, one of our "Extraordinary People," has said, "Mental illness is something I'll always live with, but I can manage it now. I'm not ashamed of it, and I hope in sharing my story publicly, it will help reduce the stigma and give hope to others."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard T. Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'R'.

Richard Clarke, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer
Magellan Health Services of Arizona