

## Mental Illness: An Unfortunate Truth

Mental illness has been an unfortunate fact of life for me. While I have yet to be touched by any sort of disorder, members of my family have suffered through major depression and anxiety. I still vividly remember as a child seeing a homeless man in Kane'ohe talking and yelling at people who weren't there. Seeing a man walk down the street with a twitch in his arm and a vacant look in his eyes. Most people may not recognize it, but undiagnosed and developing mental illnesses are still pressing issues for our hawaiian ohana.

Most people have chalked up the strange behavior of the homeless to drug or alcohol addiction. But what I have learned is that this is usually not the whole story. Sometimes people become addicted to something as an escape from their illness (most commonly depression or anxiety), and in some situations alcohol and drugs can intensify undiagnosed or underlying mental disorders within a person while that person is under the influence. If taken frequently and over a long period of time, as most addicts would do, symptoms of psychoses such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder can begin to manifest. While the homeless may have drug-induced mental illnesses or have become homeless because of their reliance to their substance of choice, it is entirely possible the people on the street are there simply because their mental imbalance has caused normal life to be unobtainable. The greatest consumers of the public mental health system of Hawaii were homeless, and yet there are still people suffering on the streets. But the homeless aren't the only ones suffering from undiagnosed or untreated mental illnesses.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, in 2012-2013 the percentage of the total adult population of Hawaii who have or had a serious mental illness was

at 4.1%. That percentage had grown 0.5% from 2010-2011. Of Hawaii's population of mentally ill adults who qualify for treatment, 70% did not receive any form of treatment for their illness. Even more distressing, that in within the previous year, of the local youths that qualified for treatment for a Depressive Episode, 69% did not receive treatment.

If we ignore these people left untreated for their mental illnesses, they will continue to be a suffering minority of our Hawaiian ohana and as they continue to suffer, they may turn to drugs or more drastic measures to alleviate their suffering. As the population grows, so will the number of people not receiving treatment for their illnesses. We will accumulate a population of community members afflicted with mental disease that will be neglected and turned a blind eye too. Mr. Ching loved his community with a passion, and would be distressed to know that there are people whose suffering could be averted if they simply had the help to receive the treatment they need.

A solution could be as follows: a marketing campaign to raise awareness and lower stigma surrounding these issues as well as a push to improve the availability of Mental illness treatment. If the members of our community were better educated about the illnesses that may be plaguing the people they see everyday, they would approach said people with less hesitation and confusion. They would be less likely to turn a blind eye to their friends and family who are suffering or to the homeless man on the street talking to the voices in his head. I believe that if our community was made aware of what this issue really is, they themselves would take initiative and work to bring about solutions and end the suffering on their own. The sick themselves would be pushed to find aid for themselves if they knew that their illness had a treatment, and how to seek said treatment. All they need is a push in the right direction.

Mr. T.C. Ching had always helped his community to help themselves. His heart always went out to those who were suffering and he worked to create situations in which solutions to major problems would be easily obtainable. If we were to channel Mr. Ching's compassionate and problem-solving philosophy into our community today, I am positive that we could end the suffering of all those of our ohana with mental illnesses. Mr. Ching was a man who cared deeply for the well being of his community, and he was the type of man who would not hesitate to help those who were sick in his community, both physically and mentally. Why would the philosophy of his legacy be any different?

## Works Cited

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