Overcoming Resistance to Mental Health Care

How Samuel Went From Reluctant to Inspired When Receiving Behavioral Health Care

Samuel was in and out of the hospital for months during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. As he struggled with feeling isolated and depressed, VNS Health's geriatric mental health services team stepped in. Samuel and his wife were reluctant to receive help at first – but that would soon change.

In January 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic began, Samuel spent time in the hospital and then wasn't able to leave home while he recovered. He felt alone and isolated, and he struggled with depression. So when he was diagnosed with

COVID-19 and went back to the hospital just a few months later, he knew what was in store.

As Samuel spent months in and out of the hospital, he and his wife, Vanessa, became all too familiar with those feelings of isolation and depression. Social distancing during the pandemic made coping even harder.

> *He was crying a lot and very distressed. It was so hard for his wife to be his only person.*
>
> *— Susan, program manager and therapist, VNS Health geriatric mental health treatment services*

A Less Than Enthusiastic Start

Samuel and Vanessa were also familiar with something else: the hope that connection and counseling can bring.

Even so, the couple was resistant at first. When Susan, a behavioral health counselor with VNS Health, contacted them. Samuel did not want to talk, and Vanessa's anger stopped her from letting anyone in. But despite this rocky start, Susan refused to let that get in the way of giving care.

"Susan Never Gave Up on Us"

Susan called week after week to check in on the couple and even started meeting them in person after they were vaccinated. As time went on and Samuel progressed, Vanessa was grateful for Susan's care. "We need you to keep checking up on us," Vanessa said. "The things you do might seem small, but they are not small to us."

Susan continued with regular mental health check-ups for Samuel and served as a sounding board for Vanessa, in addition to connecting the couple with meal delivery resources and COVID-19 testing. Susan even helped Samuel register to vote, and he cast a ballot for the first time in the 2020 presidential election.

Geriatric Mental Health Services at VNS Health

Samuel and Vanessa learned first-hand how important it is to get mental health care, especially while also coping with physical illness.

It's this truth – that mental health is a part of overall health – that drives VNS Health's behavioral health team.

Mental health care is especially critical for seniors, because aging can come with challenges, both physical and emotional, that take a toll on mental health. Illness and loss of mobility, as well as loneliness and grief as loved ones die, may lead to conditions like depression, anxiety, and memory loss. However, older adults may be hesitant about seeking

help. Their health needs often go unnoticed or are misdiagnosed.

VNS Health has several community programs that provide mental health services to meet people where they are. Mental health care can also be part of home care and hospice care. If a VNS Health nurse notices that a patient seems to be experiencing depression, anxiety, or isolation, for example, they'll bring in a behavioral health team member. Nurses also check in with caregivers, because watching a loved one go through an illness can be just as emotionally taxing on them as it is for the people they help.

Susan Inspires Samuel

Whether someone needs behavioral health services for weeks, months, or years, the team at VNS Health is always there making a palpable difference in the lives of the people they care for.

"I was mad at the world and pushed away at first," Samuel said. "But everyone needs somebody to talk to. Susan inspires me with our conversations."

Your donation can help people like Samuel and Vanessa as they cope with the challenges of mental health conditions.

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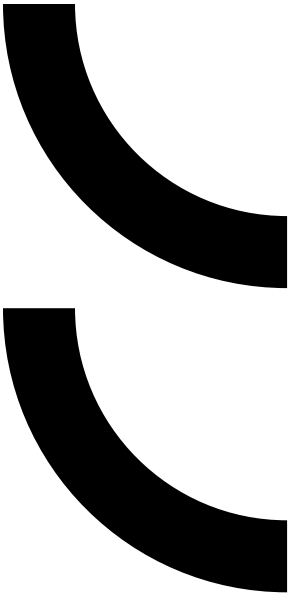

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