

One Treatment Team's Belief of Recovery on an Inpatient Unit

By Faren Levell, MS, LCSW, LMFT

Most of us know the importance of our interactions with others in helping us to feel well-balanced and successful in life. We easily see that, at certain difficult points in life, a relationship with one or two special people can help us through difficult times. By simply **believing in us** when we're down and out or feeling hopeless, these special people give us strength to keep going. This "believing" assistance is especially true and important in the mental health field.

The Period of Lost Hope is a Critical Therapeutic Moment

When individuals take their first steps into a psychiatric inpatient unit, they are often at one of the lowest points in their life. They have frequently lost hope and the belief that life can improve. Sometimes they feel abandoned by those who are closest to them and feel they have no one they can trust.

Often times the staff working on an inpatient unit has a short window of opportunity in helping the person begin or restart recovery. With the first step into the inpatient recovery area, staff members have the opportunity to offer **compassion and hope**. It is very important that each individual on the staff conveys an immediate **belief in the person** that he or she has the power to improve and overcome this difficult moment.

It has been observed that when a staff member believes in an individual's potential for recovery, that individual begins to believe it too. It is critical to convey that message with our first interactions with inpatient guests, and it is critical that the entire treatment team consistently reinforces that message throughout the treatment process. To be able to do this, staff members need to have a "recovery is possible" mindset.

Living a Consistent Mission

Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center, located in Jasper, Indiana, provides medical care with the mission "Being for Others". On the mental health unit, our goal is to "be here for others in mental health recovery."

Our mental health caregivers operate out of their own belief system of the possibility of recovery. The initial interaction a staff member has with a new guest will always be a reflection of that person's belief system. So, how do we ensure that each staff member has a recovery mindset that is helpful to our inpatient guests? We sought to improve our own treatment team's understanding of recovery by first figuring out what each member of the team really believed.

It became very apparent to me that we have done well promoting a recovery belief system. I overheard a visiting psychiatrist ask one of our nurses about the importance of our psychoeducational groups. The nurse stated, "**We believe** that no matter how sick and out-of-touch someone appears, they will often hear one statement or idea that they will later say helped them."

What a wonderful statement that reflects hope and the belief and expectation that inpatient guests will improve. Your sincere belief in the possibility of recovery is vital in planting a personal seed of hope and recovery to someone you serve.

The Recovery Exercise

In order to validate the importance and reinforce the power of a solid belief system by our staff on recovery, we conducted the following recovery exercise. Each staff member gave at least one personal “I believe” statement in regards to recovery and mental health. The response from our staff is listed below.

I Believe ...

- 1) ...it only takes one person to make a difference in a patient’s life.
- 2) ...you must be positive to succeed.
- 3) ...everyone can succeed if given the opportunity.
- 4) ...we are a stepping-stone to success.
- 5) ...that our patients won’t believe they can get better if *we* don’t believe that they can get better.
- 6) ...a quiet, calm approach, offering choices, allowing them to make decisions as much as possible, is very important.
- 7) ...in coming to work with a good attitude.
- 8) ...in having a caring, compassionate attitude.
- 9) ...in allowing individuals to vent before jumping in to assist or redirect.
- 10) ...it takes all of us... nurses, techs, doctors, and therapists, to work as a team to bring the patient to optimal health. Each of us has a special role in how the patient will reach their goals - to succeed and maintain.
- 11) ...that for everyone who goes astray - someone will come to light the way!
- 12) ...there is a better way!
- 13) ...in making each and every patient comfortable with their stay here from the moment they set foot on the unit to the time we say our goodbyes.
- 14) ...individuals sense our sense of true compassion the second they enter the door.
- 15) ...our attitude affects our ability to help not only our patients but also each other as we work together.
- 16) ...we can make a difference.
- 17) ...that each individual, having been created in God’s image, is worth our care, respect, and support.
- 18) ...if one encouragement can help someone through an hour or a day, the time we give is worth it.
- 19) ...there are no boundaries or limits when it comes to those affected by mental illness.
- 20) ...every person strives to maintain control over their life, and we, as caregivers, need to recognize and respect efforts to gain control.
- 21) ...our attitude affects our ability to help.
- 22) ...people can get a very positive experience on our unit.
- 23) ...family and significant others are very important and have great impact on an individual’s recovery.
- 24) ...relapse of illness symptoms is not considered a failure of the individual.
- 25) ...recovery is always possible, and that we should never give up and settle for someone’s estimated *baseline functioning*.
- 26) ...hope and respect are the foundations of the helping therapeutic relationship.
- 27) ...if I cannot help or reach someone, another team member can.
- 28) ...people feel my sincerity before they understand my words.
- 29) ...people have a right to choose how to be helped.
- 30) ...medications are only one part of the many-dimensional recovery process.
- 31) ...everyone has a right to disagree with me.

- 32) ...I have learned the most about mental illnesses from individuals who have mental illnesses.
- 33) ...in the value of the team.
- 34) ...the value of the person with mental illness as being a team leader in their Recovery process.
- 35) ...anyone who wishes to work can work, regardless of his or her obstacles.
- 36) ...all individuals can love and be loved by others.
- 37) ...we cannot always rate effort on the part of an individual who is suffering.
- 38) ...recovery is seldom without setbacks.
- 39) ...we must try to understand the illness from the perspective of the person who is experiencing it.
- 40) ...passing judgment regarding illness management is seldom helpful.
- 41) ...we must recognize *efforts* as well as successes.
- 42) ...education for patients is essential to recovery.
- 43) ...recovery is an ongoing process that often starts on our unit and continues in the community; therefore, we must connect these individuals with resources they need for when they leave.
- 44) ... we can help motivate and engage our patients in wanting to recover.

Sharing and Reinforcing the Recovery Ideology

Once the staff's responses were collected, they were shared and posted in staff meeting areas. Staff members had further discussions during staff meetings and informal chats on how they might improve the methods of conveying hope, compassion and belief in recovery to every patient who came through our doors. Ideas included placing some of these statements throughout the unit for patients to see. We also posted statements from the sections of "Recovery" from Team Solutions when doing groups.

What We Learned or Remembered:

1. It is still the relationship and the messages we give that are so important in mental health care. We want to be respectful, sincere, and compassionate in the recovery steps and how we interact with people.
2. We must look for ways to continue to deliver therapeutic interactions in spite of health care operations that often focus on electronic records, limited patient contacts, and monitoring checks and balances; these are system-oriented, not patient-oriented.
3. What staff members believe in and convey impacts directly the success of care.
4. Finally, we remembered that we believe in the recovery abilities of the people we are so fortunate to serve.

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COMING SOON – List of psychoeducational materials that the staff at Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center use successfully with inpatient guests.