

MLUWC General Meeting - February 9, 2015

Lynne McVey, CEO, Douglas Mental Health University Institute

The Future of Mental Health:
Prevention and Early Intervention with Youth

“There is no health without mental health” Dr. David Satcher, CDC

Prof. McVey spoke to us about the Mental Health Strategy for Canada which calls on all Canadians to become engaged at every level in mental health issues to create a movement for improved mental health across the country. She spoke about the Quebec narrative where the Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux du Québec developed a Mental Health Action Plan from 2005-2010 based on the realisation that, in Quebec, one in six were affected by mental health issues, Quebec had the highest suicide rates in Canada, services for children and youth were poorly developed, and there was inadequate support for people with milder mental health issues and for integration services. At this time, Phase II is being initiated with its emphasis on youth. It is interesting to note that there are no beds for mental health in either of the two new super hospitals under construction in Montreal.

One of the biggest challenges today involves dealing with the stigma attached to mental illness and changing our perception of mental illness. Medical personnel appear to be the most prejudiced against people with mental health issues, and misconceptions are rampant in the general public. Amid these challenges, the Mental Health Commission of Canada faces the possibility of having its funding cut off altogether.

The Douglas Institute is undertaking innovative research in this field and has support for its stable of leading researchers at this time. They have determined that the psychoses of the brain are based in biological changes which, if left un-treated in the early prodromal stages, lead to prolonged mental illness. Fully 4% of the population will develop psychoses, and mental illness is an illness of the young. However, most 15-20 year olds do not report their problems for fear of being stigmatised. New York City has a billboard to fight stigma with the following message: “Depression is a flaw in chemistry not character”.

The risk factors in mental health have not been clearly identified but it is known that stress, in particular prolonged stress, can be a contributing factor as can alcohol and drug abuse. Many of the homeless suffer from mental health issues as do people with addictions. There has been an increase in demand in Quebec, and in particular in Montreal, for emergency services related to mental health issues in the past few years.

By getting all of us to better recognize and eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness it is Lynne McVey’s belief that it will be possible to give our community’s youth the care and ultimately the mental health they deserve so that they have the brightest future.