

## How many are suffering in silence?

MARK PAVILONS

Human beings are the chameleons at the top of the food chain. We are experts at putting on a face and hiding ? from one another and from ourselves.

We are the consummate actors, players on the world's stage as Shakespeare put it. We play many roles during our ?careers? and don many masks.

We come together to recognize and discuss mental health Jan. 30 for the annual Bell Let's Talk Day. It's meant as a reminder for us all to understand one another's issues, and raise money for mental health programs.

According to CMHA, by the time Canadians reach 40 years of age, 1 in 2 have, or have had, a mental illness. And 34% of Ontario high-school students indicate a moderate-to-serious level of psychological distress (symptoms of anxiety and depression).

Surprisingly, 14% indicate a serious level of psychological distress.

I'm no expert in mental health, but I do believe that one of the most common ailments is depression. But this, too, comes in many forms and degrees.

Depression is much more than simple unhappiness and clinical depression, sometimes called major depression, is a complex mood disorder caused by various factors. Depression is not something that people can ?get over? on their own.

Depression is more common in women, though the gender difference diminishes with age in Canada. Men with depression typically have a higher rate of feeling irritable, angry and discouraged. This can make it harder to recognize depression in men.

Some people have the mistaken idea that it is normal for older adults to feel depressed. Older adults often don't want to talk about feeling hopeless, sad, losing interest in normally pleasurable activities, or experiencing prolonged grief after a loss.

Apparently, depression among children and teens is on the rise and that's something we can't ignore. In this case, it's more than just the typical teen angst and I've seen this among my kids' peers. It makes me sad that young people with such great potential, suffer needlessly.

The main symptom of depression is a sad, despairing mood that is present most days and lasts for more than two weeks. For more severe cases, it impairs the person's performance at work, at school or in social relationships.

It can lead to changes in weight, sleep problems, loss of interest and withdrawal from friends and family.

I have mild depression and I take my ?happy pill??daily. This may come as a surprise to many, given my outgoing nature and sense of humour.

My depression started when I? suddenly lost my job, after the newspaper I worked at closed its doors. There I was, in my late 40s, scurrying for a job. I? leveraged every last one of my contacts and connections, but nothing of substance materialized. I? worked part-time at odd jobs and contract positions for almost two years.

To me, feeling depressed about my situation was a ?normal??response to external circumstances. Wouldn't anyone become irritated, frustrated, worried and experience feelings of ?hopelessness? in my situation?

I? still believe stress affects everyone and it's okay to become a little ?sad? now and then.

It's funny though, my job loss was more devastating than losing my parents and sister. ?But I do carry some feelings of guilt and pain that I try to bury.

My youngest often asks me why I don't talk much about my mom, who passed away in 2010. I think it relates to her debilitating stroke which left her paralyzed. I? know it has a lot to do with putting her in a long-term care facility. Seeing her there in her condition, getting very little real care, literally broke my heart. I visited her almost every day and I can't fully explain the dread I? felt.

In the end she died of late-stage lung and pancreatic cancer, conditions that went undiagnosed during her nursing home stay.

I thought these were reasons enough to feel depressed.

My sister's death in 2001 was a bit tough as well. She was only in her mid-40s when she suffered massive organ failure, brought on by diabetes and kidney failure. She went blind just before her first kidney transplant, which she received from her ex-husband. Part of my weekly responsibility back then was driving her to the hospital for dialysis.

My dad's passing in 1998 was less traumatic. He was diagnosed with lymphoma and was only given months to live. He managed to live for three years with the disease and died somewhat peacefully at home.

I'm not looking for sympathy here. Many people have stories like mine. Humans suffer a lot during their lives, but we are quite

resilient.

I think what I'm trying to impart is that we should try to be cognizant of others. We shoot the breeze with our bank tellers, co-workers and acquaintances. But how much do we know about their circumstances?? What tragedies have they suffered? My guess is that most of us have experienced loss, death, financial and a job related stress.

I believe we should treat others like human beings with similar hopes, desires, dreams and yes, problems. We are more alike than we'd like to think.

For that reason alone, we should support our fellow men, women and children, in whatever predicament they find themselves in. There's strength in numbers.

Mental health is everyone's concern.