

Mental health awareness



**Manuel L.
Peralta Jr.**

This month's column is dedicated to mental health awareness and resources available to all of us. Mental health is a tricky subject. We fear saying we need help, but we know that we could use it. We may need support, but we fear asking for it.

Larrissa shared the following:

"There is a stigma to mental health disorders. People don't want to be labeled as having depression. We need to recognize as a culture that mental health is a biopsychosocial condition just like diabetes, heart disease and so forth."
—Charles Bombardier, Ph.D.

Mental health has always been a taboo subject, but as a society we are starting to come around to the views expressed by Dr. Bombardier. We have seen many professional athletes discuss their struggles publicly, and that has begun to shed some light, and much needed attention, on issues of mental health. As a society, we must address mental health and treat emotional conditions just like any other injury. Mental health after a work injury is often overlooked. People associate only post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to these kind of occurrences. Although often PTSD is a significant diagnosis after traumatic injuries such as vehicle accidents, assaults or dog bites, other injuries can bring a dif-

John contributed the following:

Earlier this spring we lost a sister to suicide. In hindsight, the writing was on the wall and many were left wondering, if they had acted on the signs sooner, or with more urgency, would she still be alive? I don't think that question could ever be answered. Suicide is complicated.

How do we know if someone is just more stressed than normal, or if they are experiencing mental health issues? The stress level in our jobs as letter carriers tends to run high, more often than not. It's difficult to see when our co-workers are emotionally distressed when we are dealing with our own issues. It's hard when you're only with your co-workers for a few hours every morning. Too often when someone we know dies by suicide, we are left saying to ourselves, "In hindsight, the writing was on the wall."

It's hard not to dwell on this. Could I have made a dif-

ferent type of emotional condition that often goes untreated and can be disregarded by the injured worker as well as others around them. A recent study by Beyond Blue showed that 1 in 3 people experience major depression after a traumatic injury, which can affect recovery from the injury. Lengthy periods away from work can increase depression and anxiety.

An injured letter carrier can experience claim delays, which could cause financial stress as well as delays in treatment. They can feel pressure from management to return to work, as well as their own desire to get back to the route. An injured carrier will miss the comradery of the workplace and can begin to feel isolated, which only adds to depression. Unable to be out and about enjoying life, seeing friends and family or just fresh air and sun all can be linked to furthering the spiral into depression.

How can you help? Check on your friends and co-workers who are suffering from an injury, and encourage them to talk about how they are feeling with a professional. Get them out of the house when possible or visit them in person to see how they are doing. Let them know you are in their corner and offer whatever assistance they may want, even if it's just talking. Be the friend you would want if you were in that situation.

ference? Again, there is no answer to that question. Suicide is complicated. What is important to know is how to recognize the warning signs. If more people know the most common signs that someone is depressed or experiencing mental health issues, the better chance we have of getting them the help they need. It takes a community effort: friends, relatives, co-workers, employers.

The sister I spoke of exhibited signs of distress, but to different people, at different times. Individually, these signs may not have appeared alarming. However, collectively, the writing was on the wall. She had lost a loved one earlier in the year around the holidays. She stopped coming to work on a regular basis. She was isolated. She left a note in the break room. Maybe a conversation, a friendly gesture, or assistance with seeking help would have made a difference.

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I want to thank Larrissa and John for their willingness to add to this month's column and to help open a dialogue with each other.

The work you do each and every day requires your full attention. You need to be able to do what you have been trained to do and to do it safely. If we are not at our best, we tend to miss signs that warn us of impending harm.

In my September 2021 column, I shared that I had been watching the Olympics and, like millions of us throughout the country, was rooting for Simone Biles. I repeat a few words from that column:

...The Olympics puts them in the spotlight with expectation and pressure. During Week One, gymnast Simone Biles pulled out of the competition because she did not feel right. The critics could accept a physical injury as justification to pull away, but they could not accept that she stepped away because she did not feel right mentally.

One report I read indicated that on arriving at the Olympic Village, when she expected to be embarrassed, she was instead thanked. She was thanked by the athletes who feel the pressure and know how tough the whole process is. She became a hero of another kind when she stood tall and said it's OK not to be OK. And she took a breath. And many of us took a breath with her...

I believe that Simone should be presented with a special gold medal for saying it's OK not to be OK.

She deserves additional accolades for stepping up and testifying before Congress on Sept. 15, 2021, to shed light on the abuse that she and other competitors suffered as a result of failures of the USA Gymnastics and the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committees.

During this summer's Olympics, she earned three more gold medals and one silver.

No one knows what another person is suffering through, until you know. Be kind and keep a watchful eye on each other. If you need guidance, contact your national business agent's office or contact me.

Here are some additional resources.

First, I remind you that we have a number of items related to Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services on the NALC's web pages. Please refer to my April column to help you navigate the information available.

You can also go directly to the USPS EAP page at EAP4you.com, which takes you to the current service provider's home page. Scroll to bottom of page and enter your ZIP Code. In results, hover over "health" then hover over to "mental health care" and then click. This will open up resources in your area.

Another resource is Loveyourmindtoday.org. Its home page introduction includes the following description:

Caring for your mind only makes you stronger. Taking care of your mind allows you to be your best self. Reflecting on your feelings and stressors can help you deal with whatever life throws your way.

Explore guides with instruction and insight for dealing with difficult situations.

The U.S. Department of Labor has an initiative on mental health that began in 2016. DOL.gov takes you to its main page, where you should find an icon/link to Mental Health at Work. Clicking there will take you to a YouTube video with an introduction by Julie A. Su, acting U.S. secretary of labor.

More information on the subject of mental health can be found on the following link, dol.gov/mentalhealth. It opens a page with many additional resources.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline ([visit online at suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://visitonlineatsuicidepreventionlifeline.org))—We all can help prevent suicide. The lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals. By starting the conversation and providing support to those who need it, we can help prevent suicide and save lives. If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide—whether you are in crisis or not—call or live chat the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) at samhsa.gov/suicide provides help for someone you know: Learn how to recognize the warning signs when someone's at risk—and what you can do to help. If you believe someone may be in danger of suicide:

- Call 911 if danger for self-harm seems imminent.
- Ask them if they are thinking about killing themselves. This will not put the idea into their head or make it more likely that they will attempt suicide.
- Listen without judging and show you care.
- Stay with the person or make sure the person is in a private, secure place with another caring person until you can get further help.
- Remove any objects that could be used in a suicide attempt.

The SAMHSA pages also include a Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator (findtreatment.samhsa.gov), a confidential and anonymous source of information for people seeking treatment facilities for substance use/addiction and/or mental health problems.

Veterans have additional resources through the Department of Veterans Affairs. Information on those resources can be found on the Veterans Group column on page 62.