

Mental Health Awareness

As Tuesday the 10th of October is World Mental Health Day, I thought I'd share some of my experiences, some of them very recent, which will help raise awareness and hopefully open doors to anyone that may be suffering with Mental Health issues.

Some of you may already be aware that, due to work pressures, I've been suffering with stress-induced palpitations since August 2013. The palpitations became more serious in 2014 which resulted in an appointment with a Cardiologist Consultant in June of that year. Despite his reassurances that my heart was ok, the bouts of palpitations had led to serious anxiety issues over my heart's functionality.

During the rest of 2014, when the palpitations allowed, I started to increase my levels of exercise to try and recover from the difficulties I'd encountered and increase the confidence in my heart. In 2015 and 2016 I thought I was making good progress, the bouts of palpitations still occurred but had reduced in intensity and frequency and I thought I'd dealt with the anxiety.

However, following the terrible news events in May and June 2017, my anxiety levels flared up. The fears about my heart reappeared with such an impact that I had to take 6 weeks off work and reduce my involvement in many things, for example, the Garden Party and the visit of Duggie Dug Dug.

As my manager at work was concerned by my reaction to the events, she suggested that I look to start counselling and sent me details of a telephone counselling service. I balked at idea of counselling as I didn't think that I needed it. I'd always managed to cope in the past and given the state of my mind at the time, the thought of explaining everything to someone I didn't know over the phone, filled me with dread.

After a meeting with HR at work, an appointment was made with the Company Doctor to discuss my fitness to work and when he thought I'd be able to return to my duties. As I drove to the appointment at his surgery in Whalley, I was very nervous about the outcome as I thought he would be biased towards work and I'd be forced to return too early.

As we chatted about my anxiety and stress, the conversation naturally switched to the stressful times I'd experienced since 2013 and it soon became evident that they had actually started 3 years earlier in 2010.

As the appointment came to an end, the Doctor said words that I'd never thought I would hear. He was concerned by my Mental Health and vulnerability.

Initially, those words hit me very hard, but as I drove back home, I realised that the words were exactly what I needed to hear and, looking back, that was the catalyst that led me to start the process that I'm currently benefiting from today.

Since that appointment, I've had another heart check-up (as suggested by the Company Doctor) which showed that no damage had been caused to my heart and I'm 4 weeks through 6 face to face sessions of Counselling with a Counsellor at the Royal Preston Hospital.

Again, before I started the Counselling, I doubted whether I needed it and how it would help me. How wrong I was as during the first session, the Counsellor suggested strategies and techniques that would have a massive impact on my thinking and therefore my health.

It was then that I realised that my heart problems weren't to do with any cardiology issues but that I'd been battling Mental Health issues, due to work related stress, for at least 7 years. No amount of exercise would fix those problems, I needed a new way of approaching them, and as my Counsellor said, I needed to start "challenging the anxiety".

We came up with a plan to deal with the anxiety by a step by step approach of gradual increases in the intensity of my exercise. But given my history, the Counsellor made it clear that as I went through the plan, I would still encounter setbacks and that I would need to use the techniques he had shown me to overcome these. But by persevering, I would put an end to the anxiety and the control it had on my life.

Just this week, I have managed to get closure from the problems I faced at work. During this process, and the meeting with HR, it became apparent that the Mental Health provision in my work place was severely lacking and that had, I feel, contributed dramatically to my difficulties.

In order to obtain closure, I read out a statement at the start of the meeting with HR and I started it with the following –

"I am probably feeling the best I've felt in a number of years. I feel more in control of my future health and more able to deal with situations that I will face.

The main reason I'm feeling a lot better is because I feel that I have been heard. The Company Doctor, listened, responded and directed. The Cardiologist, clarified and reassured and my Counsellor, analysed and advised. And by being heard, I could start to heal"

That was it in a nut-shell, "by being heard, I could start to heal".

Mental Health is historically viewed as a taboo subject with stigmas and discrimination attached. Its impact is undervalued in the work place and misunderstood by many who have the power to make changes. And unless the resultant symptoms become so severe that they are noticeable or disabling, it is ignored by society in general, including, for example, those in the Church environment. It is, as I have shown, also difficult for those directly stricken to admit that they are suffering with Mental Health problems.

Recently, Mental Health has become more of a hot topic in society and provision is gradually being put in place to help support those who suffer from this invisible and difficult to diagnose illness.

“Time To Change” which is run by charities Mind and Rethink Mental Illness and supported through funding from the Department of Health, Comic Relief and the Big Lottery Fund, are training volunteers to become “Champions” for Mental Health in the work place.

To allow Mental Health issues to be spotted earlier before they escalate, the “Champions” are on the “shop floor” to try and recognise if people have started to act differently and to step in and offer support if necessary. They also aim to change the culture in the organisation in an attempt to change the viewpoint of Mental Health and the devastating impact it can cause on a personal and professional level.

As I said earlier, the biggest steps to tackling Mental Health issues is to recognise the situation at the earliest opportunity and to ensure that the person affected gets the support they need and is heard.

I still have quite a way to go on my journey to recovery and as the anxiety is well established in my psyche, I’m resigned to have setbacks along the way but I’ll be forever indebted to the Company Doctor who spotted the signs and uttered those dreaded words that may just have changed, and possibly saved, my life.

If, after reading this article, you feel that you can relate to some of the things I’ve mentioned, then please seek help either through your GP, your friends, your Church family, your family or one of the many charities that specialise in Mental Health support. Don’t let fear, stubbornness or embarrassment stop you getting the help you need.

I will be glad to share the techniques that my counsellor has shared with me and I also have two CDs with relaxation and breathing exercises which I have found very useful. I will be happy to create copies for anyone who requires them

Thank you for your support and for listening.

Mike Owen

You don't have to be an expert to talk about mental health.



Talk, but listen too: simply being there will mean a lot.



Keep in touch: meet up, phone, email or text.



Don't just talk about mental health: chat about everyday things as well.



Remind them you care: small things can make a big difference.



Be patient: ups and downs can happen.

Find out more about mental health and how to be there for someone at time-to-change.org.uk

Someone you know has a mental health problem.

Ready to start your conversation?

it's time to talk. it's time to change

let's end mental health discrimination



I CAN'T TAKE THIS ISN'T WHAT I WANT
I DON'T KNOW THERE'S WHO I AM I CAN'T COPE
MUCH THEY HATE ME I WANT TO BE ALONE
I KNOW THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT ME THERE'S TOO MUCH
TO DO I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH
I'M USELESS WHY DOES IT ALWAYS HAPPEN TO ME
IT'S ALL MY FAULT I'M A FAILURE
LIFE IS NOT WORTH LIVING



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