

Ms. Mayer : Schizophrenia Is "Disturbance In Mood"

By Audrey C. Lodato
Post Staff Writer

Schizophrenia. A big word. A big problem for those who suffer from it or have family members who do.

Anne Mayer is coordinator for the re-entry program at Mecklenburg County Mental Health Services' satellite office on Beatties Ford Rd. "We try to help people who have dropped out of community life," she explained.

According to Ms. Mayer, schizophrenia is a "disturbance in mood, thought, perception, and behavior." The illness, which is most likely to strike during the late teens and early twenties and cuts across all socio-economic lines, can control a person's moods in ways that are inappropriate. For instance, a victim of the disease might laugh on learning of the death of someone close.

Schizophrenia affects a person's logical thinking, making it impossible to draw conclusions, such as the probability that it will be hot in July.

Perception is also affected. A schizophrenic may hallucinate, hearing voices, seeing things, feeling sensations, tasting or smelling for no apparent reason. It's an easy step to move from constantly experiencing a peculiar taste to believing you are being poisoned, Ms. Mayer pointed out. Such delusions, or



Reentry program staff shown above. Don "Cisco" Mills and Anne Mayer. From left to right, are Patty Hamrick,

Second in series

false beliefs, are a common part of schizophrenia. These changes in perception and accompanying delusions lead to changes in behavior which may make the person appear odd or crazy to others.

Ms. Mayer likened schizophrenia to living in a dream, wherein fantasy and reality merge. Unlike a dream, however, the schizophrenic doesn't wake up to the real world.

"Nobody is really sure what causes schizophrenia," the mental health

practitioner explained. Some believe the illness is caused by environment and family influences. Others think the disorder is genetic. Stress is sometimes thought to bring on the illness. Some groups, such as the Schizophrenia Association of the Carolinas, believing that vitamin deficiencies are to blame, focus on dietary considerations.

The Mental Health Center program treats the illness as a chemical imbalance in the brain. Whether the imbalance causes the disease or vice versa, chemical imbalances do af-

fect a large number of schizophrenics. Ms. Mayer believes that more than one factor is probably involved in bringing on the disorder.

Various medications are used to reduce or eliminate symptoms. How effective they are is partly influenced by how long the person has had the illness. Recovery is also affected by intelligence, the person's support system, and how the victim was before the onset of the disease.

Mental Health's re-entry program includes patient education classes to help schizophrenics understand

what they are dealing with. Patients are provided information about symptoms, medications and their side-effects, relapses, and what they can do to help themselves.

The program also sponsors a family education class. "A person's family has a bigger impact on recovery than the therapist," Mayer pointed out. Family members must learn to deal with the illness and may go through a grief process at the loss of the sick person's former self. Parents may have to lower expectations of what their child can accomplish. The class setting also serves as a place where families can bolster and support each other.

At present, there are four patient groups held each week, serving about 40 people. Schizophrenia has a devastating effect on a person's social interaction and self-esteem, so these are areas that the patient groups work on. Patty Hamrick is a therapist for one such group. "We do things to make them intermingle," she explained. Recent activities in her group have included working on conversational skills, talking about depression and how to deal with it, and participating in a jazz routine.

Social worker Don Mills is in the process of developing a program which will give employers tax

breaks for hiring these handicapped individuals. He hopes to get the employment program off the ground by early next year.

Mayer, who was hired less than a year ago to start the re-entry program at the Beatties Ford Rd. location, has seen some progress. "Some patients have been able to move on to work environments," she said. "We're trying to close a lot of the gaps that people fall through."

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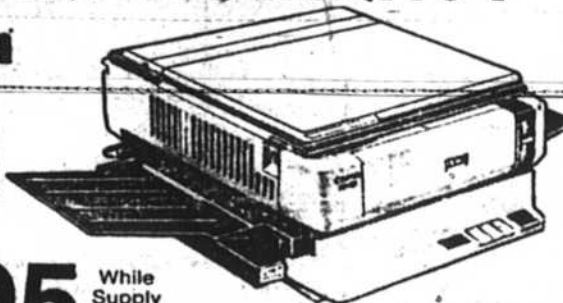
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ELOQUENT GUEST SPEAKER - The Very Rev. Dr. Emmanuel W. Johnson, right, President of the Standing Committee of The Episcopal Diocese of Liberia, was guest speaker and Celebrant of the Holy Eucharist at St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church last Sunday morning. The distinguished churchman was in Charlotte, N.C. visiting his close and long-time friend, Father Edward G. W. King Jr. (center), newly appointed Vicar of St. Michael's Episcopal Church and former

Dean of Trinity Cathedral, Liberia. Dr. Johnson is presently Dean of Trinity Cathedral, Monrovia, Liberia, Former President of Cuttington University College and Divinity School, Episcopal Church, African Province of the Anglican Church, Liberia. Dr. Johnson came to America to attend the Diocese of Maine Convention where the Diocese of Liberia is partner in mission with the Diocese of Maine. Photo By Peeler's Portrait Studio.

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