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Residents Report More Poor Mental Health Days;

Putnam's Mental Health Month events highlight message: problems common but treatable

BREWSTER, NY— Mental health problems are terribly common: one in five Americans experiences mental illness in a given year. In Putnam County the numbers are similar, and may be rising. In a recent national survey, Putnam residents estimated more poor mental health days per month than they had reported in previous years. This May, Mental Health Month, Putnam's community organizations and the county's Department of Health are joining to bring awareness, sensitivity and action to this problem.

“The high numbers of mental health problems means that virtually everyone has a family member or close personal friend who lives with a mental health issue, or they are living with one themselves,” said County Executive MaryEllen Odell. “The ultimate role of government is to protect its citizenry—that’s why our health department and our department of social services and mental health, along with many community partners, have selected mental health as a priority for our community health improvement plan. It’s also why the Suicide Prevention Task Force was established in the County.”

Interim Health Commissioner Michael J. Nesheiwat, MD, explained, “These rising numbers of reported poor mental health days are something we must take seriously.” The data comes from the national premier telephone survey, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), and Putnam residents have reported 3.1 poor mental health days in the previous month—up from 2.2 days in previous surveys.

“While mental illnesses are extremely common, they unfortunately are not talked about often,” said Megan Castellano, executive director of the Mental Health Association in Putnam County, Inc. “This is

problematic because they are also very treatable, and help is available here in Putnam County. We need to speak up and encourage sharing. This is key to breaking down stigma—to show that if you live with a mental illness, you are not alone with your feelings and your symptoms.”

To highlight how widespread mental health challenges are and to bring awareness to how these conditions can be diagnosed and successfully treated, the Putnam County chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is sponsoring its Third Annual Mental Health Awareness Walk on Saturday, May 14, from 9 am to Noon. Registration begins at 8 a.m. and forms must be turned in by 8:50 a.m. at the Carmel Fire House. For more information, including a registration form, visit NAMI Putnam on the web at www.namiputnam.org.

Putnam residents can also join mental health providers and other community organizations for the Mental Health Recovery Conference, entitled “Redefining Mental Health: Perspectives on Wellness and Recovery,” on May 12 from 9:30 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. at the Putnam County Golf Course.

“This inspiring event will feature consumers, family members, and acclaimed national and state leaders who will speak about wellness and initiate change in our way of thinking about mental health recovery,” says Diane Russo, chief executive officer of Putnam Family & Community Services, one of the organizations hosting the event. For further information, visit the Putnam Family & Community Services website at www.pfcsinc.org.

The national theme of this year’s Mental Health Month is “Life with a Mental Illness,” a call to action by Mental Health America, Ms. Castellano’s national organization, to share what life with a mental illness feels like to someone going through it. One way is by tagging social media posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike. Posting with the hash tag helps fight the stigma and shame that accompany mental illness—and that can prevent individuals from seeking help early on. The Putnam County Department of Health will be sharing national and local stories on their Facebook page during May.

Ms. Castellano, together with Marla Behler, program coordinator for the Child Advocacy Center of Putnam County, co-chair the Suicide Prevention Task Force that started in 2013. Preventing suicide along

with improving mental health were two priorities identified during the development of the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). Task force members and CHIP partners include the Mental Health Providers Group and numerous other local organizations.

Mental Health Month, commemorated each May, was started 67 years ago by Mental Health America. Its overarching purpose is to raise awareness about mental health conditions and the importance of good mental health for everyone. Online youth and adult screening tools are available at its website, under “Finding Help.” Fact sheets on depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder are listed under “Mental Health Info.” The web address is: www.mentalhealthamerica.net.

For a list of mental health resources in Putnam County, visit the Putnam County Cares app www.putnamcountycares.com/speak and in the menu on the right, click on “Resource List.”

The Health Department’s mission is to improve and protect the health of Putnam County residents through prevention of illness and injury. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, environmental health protection, family health promotion, emergency preparedness and health education. For more information, please visit the website at www.putnamcountyny.com; or the social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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