

Caring *for the Ages*



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Approximately 15% of older adults in the United States live with a mental health condition. What does their care look like and how can it be improved? **6**

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Photo by Robina Weermeijer on Unsplash

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Managing Serious Mental Illness: Team Training, Antipsychotic Therapy, and Research Trends

By Christine Kilgore

At Harmony Pointe Nursing Center in Lakewood, CO, where about 30% of residents have a chronic, serious mental illness (SMI) such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, the staff receive training about mental illnesses and how to manage behaviors. Psychiatrists and other experts contracted by the facility's parent company and available through local community alliances help manage treatments and other needs.

But equally important, say Frances Holliday, BSN, RN, the facility's administrator, and Jamie Francuski, BSW, resident services coordinator, is the "in-the-moment" education that occurs with staff to discuss particular behaviors and unmet needs, and an overall approach at the center that promotes open-mindedness and individualized care.

"When I was a nurse I was terrified of behavioral health. I didn't understand the behaviors, the disease process — any of that," Ms. Holliday told *Caring*. "Then when I started working with people with dementia and realizing that some of them had primary behavioral or mental health diagnoses, it made me



Photo courtesy of Harmony Pointe Nursing Center.

Frances Holliday, BSN, RN, and Jamie Francuski, BSW, plan activities at Harmony Pointe Nursing Center in Lakewood, CO.

realize how much I need to focus on the person and not the disease process."

Not all individuals with SMI are admitted at Harmony Point; those who are not stable on medications, for instance, or who have physically violent behaviors or who frequently slip away

from buildings tend not to be a good fit. But in caring for those who are admitted, being "open-minded and thinking outside the box has helped us to be successful," Ms. Holliday said.

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Key Guidelines for Gradual Dosage Reductions of Psychotropic Medications

By Rick Foley, PharmD, CPh, FASCP, BCGP

Gradual dosage reductions (GDRs) of psychotropic medications are required by federal guidelines in skilled nursing facilities. Equally important is the fact that GDRs are a crucial cornerstone of good clinical and pharmaceutical care. Thorough evaluation of each medication prescribed to residents should be made on a routine

basis, with detailed documentation justifying the continued utilization of any medication. This process is especially crucial when medications are being employed outside the typical standards of care. I am often asked, "How does a facility implement a successful graduation dose reduction program?"

Who is a Candidate for GDR of Psychotropic Medication?

Many nursing home residents routinely take multiple medications, many of which have unwanted side effects. In the broadest sense, any resident taking any medication should be considered a

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