

Additional Resources

Person-Centered Care

Start the Conversation, Stop the Stigma

October 10, 2018 – Optum Health Hub Blog Post for Mental Health Awareness Day

<https://hub.uhg.com/news/optum/Start-Behavioral-Health-Conversation/3309>



Finding the right words to say when talking about behavioral health conditions can be challenging. In everyday conversation, terminology we use to describe diagnoses can take on new meaning. Volatile weather is sometimes described as "bipolar" or a scattered co-worker may describe himself as "ADHD."

Today, we celebrate World Mental Health Awareness Day. As part of our efforts to Start the Conversation and Stop the Stigma, Optum Behavioral Health put together a suggested language guide for discussing behavioral health conditions. The guide is person-centered, recovery oriented and clinically accurate.

As a community, we recognize behavioral health conditions are a part of a person's life, but it doesn't define who they are. Instead of saying "she's depressed," an appropriate phrase would be "she has a diagnosis of depression." Or, instead of "he's schizophrenic," say "he has been diagnosed with schizophrenia."



While it may seem harmless, non-medical and non-scientific use of behavioral health terms **undermine the seriousness of these conditions**, spread misinformation and perpetuate a negative stigma.

The difference is simple but meaningful. Our language guide helps describe the condition as part of the person's health at a point in time not as a defining characteristic.

Optum Guide to Behavioral Health Terminology

Link to Optum Guide:

https://hub.uhg.com/HUBNews/Documents/Optum/Behavioral_Health_Condition_Language_Guide.pdf

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Behavioral Health terminology recommendations

When communicating about behavioral health conditions, we face a challenge. Many terms used to describe these diagnoses have taken on other meanings in everyday language. For example, volatile weather conditions may be described as "bipolar," or a scattered co-worker may describe himself as "ADHD."



At Optum, we recognize that a behavioral health condition is part of a person's life, but it doesn't define their life. We recommend using language that is person-centered, recovery oriented and clinically accurate. For example, instead of saying "she's depressed," an appropriate phrase would be "she has a diagnosis of depression." Or, instead of "her's schizophrenic," say "she has been diagnosed with schizophrenia."

The difference is simple: the former options define the person as their condition, while the latter options describe the condition as part of the person's health at a point in time.

While it may seem harmless, non-medical and non-scientific use of behavioral health terms **undermine the seriousness of these conditions**, spread misinformation and perpetuate a negative stigma.

Choosing the right words

There are no universal rules that teach us how to talk about behavioral health. At Optum, we understand that we must strike a balance between our responsibility to help reduce stigma and our ability to talk to clients and members in language that is familiar and easy to understand. Optum Behavioral Health recently reviewed the terminology it uses through interviews with internal clinical and non-clinical experts and external resources to develop the following recommendations.

Remember that when the topic of conversation is an individual's experience with a behavioral health condition, ask them what their personal preferences are.



Most importantly, communicate with sensitivity and respect. To change how we perceive behavioral health conditions, we can start by changing the conversation.

PREFERRED	RATIONALE
 Mental health condition	The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: 5th Edition (DSM-5) term used to describe a condition that involves changes in thinking, mood, and/or behavior, affecting how an individual relates to others and makes choices.
 Mental illness	A recognized term to describe mental health conditions used by sources such as SAMSHA and NAMI.
 He/she has been diagnosed with OR has a diagnosis of <insert clinical diagnosis>	Clinically appropriate phrase that emphasizes the individual rather than the condition.
 He/she has <insert clinical diagnosis>	Clinically appropriate phrase that emphasizes the individual rather than the condition.
 He/she died by suicide	This is the clinically correct, preferred term. The phrase "died by" is neutral, as opposed to "commit" or "attempt." See "Do not use" section below for more information on those terms.