

Emergency Preparedness Is a Choice

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- Many physicians braved the conditions to come in and see patients; and staff members, despite long commutes, made it in on time for their shifts.
- The Family Residency team battled the storm daily to meet the needs of patients.
- Diane packed an overnight bag to ensure her readiness for the next day's morning shift, and others did the same, sleeping overnight at the hospital to ensure patient coverage

What Can My Family Do to Prepare?

Disaster, whether personal, like a house fire, communitywide like a flood, or nationwide like a terrorist hazard, can strike quickly and without warning. Families can cope with disaster and reduce anxiety about future events by creating an emergency plan in advance and working together as a team. Preparing for potential hazards also will help you take effective steps to aid in recovery and care for those in need during and after the event. Appropriately involve all family members, and use the UPMC Family Emergency Guide for more ideas to help your family prepare for an emergency. Visit the Emergency Preparedness site on Infonet, and check out ready.gov for more tips and emergency planning information.

2012 Cultural Competency Series: Peer Support Vital in Mental Illness Recovery

The Cultural Competency series tells the stories of UPMC employees who put patients and others first by being culturally competent and by recognizing each other's differences.

Treating people with mental illness is one of the great challenges in medicine today. A National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) survey found that a quarter of all American adults suffer from a diagnosable mental illness in a given year, and mental illnesses are the leading cause of disability in the United States. There also is a stigma attached to mental health sufferers that isn't found with those who have physical ailments. With a broken bone you can see the injury, so it's easy to understand what's wrong. With a mental illness it can be far more difficult to perceive what's wrong. It's harder to understand a situation for someone who "looks" fine, but is suffering from a problem that lies beneath the surface.

Many people who suffer from mental health issues don't seek treatment, so a person who does ask for help should be treated with dignity and respect from the very start. The person needs to feel that someone is actually listening, and not only cares but understands. The Peer Support staff of Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic of UPMC who work throughout the organization ensure that mental health patients have someone to talk to who both cares and understands.

And they do understand, because Peer Support employs individuals who themselves suffer from a mental illness and are in recovery. The Peer Support role was created four years ago at Western Psychiatric, and the peers work closely with clinicians, therapists, and other staff to provide recovery-oriented programs to aid anyone with a mental health issue. The peers are there to

listen, to share their experiences, and to make patients who may be frightened or angry or in despair understand that they are in a place where they will be cared for.

"Recovery itself is based on hope, on being able to say that change can occur," says **Keirston Parham**, Recovery Services coordinator at Western Psychiatric. "The Peer Support staff are living proof that recovery exists. They're the role models who can actually relate to people and share some of the things that led to success for them, or led them to the point where they were just stuck, they felt there was no hope. The Peer Support staff know how to reach them — they have ideas, because they've actually lived it."

It takes a special kind of person to work with those suffering from mental illnesses; there is a physical, mental, and emotional toll to be paid. But for those in Peer Support there is an additional, personal aspect to their work. "You have to be willing to talk about your recovery," says **Jewel Denne**, director of Ambulatory Care at Western Psychiatric. "You have to be willing to say, yes, I suffered from a mental illness. And that not only helps break down the stigma for the patients, but it has an impact on the rest of our staff as well."

The peers can act as a bridge between the patient and the therapists, clinicians, and other members of the mental health staff. "Sometimes the most critical information about a person is discovered by talking to someone from Peer Support, because that's who the person feels comfortable talking to," Ms. Denne says. "If you're going in to see a doctor or psychologist, that can be intimidating for some people. People who are here to be treated will often gravitate toward the peers and share their story with them much more freely."

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Peer Support also is an invaluable resource when it comes to dealing with people who are in a very bad state, like those who require the help of the re:solve Crisis Network. People who arrive at re:solve might be at the very worst moment of their lives, and they can leave at any time they want to. Having someone to talk to who can honestly say, "Yes, I do know what you're going through, and you can find a way past this," can be the difference between staying or walking out the door.

"With a patient in crisis, you don't know how much time you're going to have with them, so you have to make an impact really fast," Mr. Parham says. "You have to build a rapport and make people feel welcome, make sure that everyone feels equal, that they want to listen to them and learn."

"A crisis is a crisis," Ms. Denne says. "It's about what's happening right here, right now, and the idea is let's get through this, and then we'll worry about the other things. So it has been a huge advantage having the peer support there to help those people in crisis."

The best way to encourage cultural competency is by sharing outstanding examples. If you or someone you work with has helped a patient with special needs, tell us about it. Email your story to inclusion@upmc.edu, and if it's chosen, the story will be included in the Cultural Competency series in Extra. By treating people the way they want to be treated, we ensure that inclusion is at the core of everything we do.

Inclusion in the Workplace: Hispanic Heritage Month

The following article is part of the Inclusion in the Workplace series, sponsored by the UPMC Center for Inclusion and the Employee Partnership Council.

There are few athletic figures who are as universally respected as Roberto Clemente. He devoted so much of his life to helping those in need that his achievements as a baseball player almost fade from view. But as we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month in September, it's important to note that Clemente was often misunderstood by the fans who would later revere him. His struggle to be accepted, and to have his Puerto Rican heritage accepted, demonstrates how important it is to treat people of different cultures with dignity and respect.

For Clemente, passive acceptance wasn't enough. If he led by example, that was because it was the only way he saw for people to live their lives. In January 1971, Clemente was given an award by the Baseball Writers Association of America. There was a dinner in his honor, and Clemente closed by explaining his personal philosophy, perhaps the most famous statement of Clemente's life: "If you have an opportunity to accomplish something that will make things better for someone coming behind you, and you don't do that, you are wasting your time on this earth."

It was a speech that many in the crowd said was one of the greatest they ever heard. As they gave Clemente a standing ovation, no one could have known that less than two years later, he would give his life demonstrating those values. When an earthquake hit Managua, Nicaragua on Dec. 23, 1972, Clemente organized a relief effort in Puerto Rico, not just raising money but personally collecting food and medical supplies. The reason he was on the plane that would crash on Dec. 31 was that officials of the corrupt Somoza government had stolen his previous three planeloads of supplies. Clemente knew that there were people who were desperate and suffering, and he believed that if he was there in person no one would dare steal from him. He boarded a rickety, overloaded plane with inexperienced pilots because he knew there were lives hanging in the balance. And his devotion to those in need cost him his own life in the end.

Across the United States and Latin American there are statues, bridges, and schools named for Clemente. Most of these posthumous honors celebrate his life off the field. The Roberto Clemente Award is given not to a major leaguer who puts up the best stats, but to the one who best displays service to the community. And the Roberto Clemente Health Clinic in Limon, Nicaragua, provides medical care to thousands of poor and isolated people, fulfilling the final humanitarian act of Roberto Clemente's life.

Roberto Clemente, a revered Pittsburgh Pirate, exemplified community social responsibility and the value that others can provide through service and volunteerism. The Employee Partnership Council's Lend a Hand event for September supports the Latino Family Center, which provides parents, many of whom are recent immigrants, with the resources they need to raise happy and healthy children. Starting a new family can be a struggle, and the economic issues can be compounded if you don't understand the language or culture. This month, you can help these families by filling your department's Lend a Hand boxes with diapers or new or gently used clothing for infants and for children up to 5 years old. There also will be a day of service on Saturday, Sept. 29, at the Latino Family Center, where volunteers will help organize children's books, clean toys, and organize resource fliers. Contact **Pam Coudriet** at coudrietpe@upmc.edu if you're interested in participating.