



June 2022

More on stigma

I just finished reading your editorial “A PSYCHIATRIC MANIFESTO: Stigma is hate speech and a hate crime” (CURRENT PSYCHIATRY, June 2022, p. 6-8, doi:10.12788/cp.0258) and had to send you this email. Our teenage son spent the last 3 years struggling with anxiety, depression, and a mood disorder. He has experienced a long hospitalization, has been in partial hospitalization programs and rehab, and now is in a therapeutic day school. Your article brought tears to my eyes because you articulated exactly what I have been feeling as a mother of a teen who struggles with mental health issues.

Our son went from an honor roll student before the pandemic to a child I barely recognized.

Approximately 6 months into the pandemic, he was using drugs, vaping nicotine, destroying our property, and eloping at night. The journey of watching his decline and getting him help was agonizing. But the stigma around what was happening to him was an entirely separate animal.

Our society vilifies, ridicules, dismisses, and often makes fun of those with mental health issues. I experience it daily with my son and am on constant guard to shoot down any comments and to calmly teach those who say such cruel things. But the shame my son feels is the most devastating part. Although we keep reminding him that his condition is a medical condition like diabetes or heart disease, for a teenage boy, that makes no sense. He just wants to be “normal.” And living in a world that rarely represents mental illness this way, it’s almost a lost cause to get him to let go of this shame. All we can do is love him, be there for him, support him, and do what we can to educate those around us about the stigma of mental illness.

What a powerful and accurate article. Thank you for putting into words what I have been thinking and feeling, and for being as outraged as we are at how this vulnerable population is treated. My husband is a psychiatrist and we live in an affluent urban area, so we are not in the middle of nowhere with no knowledge of what is happening to our son. And despite that, we still suffer from the stigma.

Thank you, Dr. Nasrallah.

Name withheld

I need to take a moment to thank you for your editorial about stigma being hate speech and a hate crime. I really agree with you, and I think the way you formulated and articulated this message is very compelling.

I have focused on normalizing mental health differences among entrepreneurs as a destigmatization strategy (see <https://www.science.direct.com/science/article/pii/S0883902622000027> and <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11187-018-0059-8>). Entrepreneurs clearly illustrate the fallacy of stigma. As a simple example, Elon Musk—the wealthiest person in the world—talks openly about being autistic, and possibly bipolar. These mental health differences help him create jobs and contribute to our shared prosperity. Nothing to be ashamed of there.

Thanks again for being such an effective advocate.

Michael A. Freeman, MD
Kentfield, California

Thank you so much for your “Psychiatric Manifesto.” I will do my best to disseminate it amongst colleagues, patients, friends, family, and as many others as possible.

Daniel N. Pistone, MD
San Francisco, California

Once again, your words hit the pin on the head.

Robert W. Pollack, MD, ABPN, DLFAPA
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Disclosures

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Comments & Controversies

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