APA Recovery to Practice Curriculum

6. Health Disparities
Health Disparities

Important Facts

On average, people with serious mental illnesses die 25 years earlier than do people without these disorders.

Higher rate of unnatural deaths attributed to:

- Suicide
- Accidents or injuries from violence
- Traumatic events
- Poorer health care

Excess rate of death from natural causes is primarily attributed to smoking and obesity.
Health Disparities

Smoking
- More severe the mental illness, the higher the prevalence of smoking
  - Therapeutic effects of smoking
  - Normalize deficits in sensory processing
  - Relieve side effects of psychotropic medications
  - Reduction in stress and anxiety

Obesity
- Prevalence of obesity far higher than the general population
  - Poor nutrition
  - Cognitive deficits
  - Poverty
  - Iatrogenic effects of medication
Health Disparities

Increased Mortality for Persons with Serious Mental Illnesses: Unnatural Factors

Suicide
• 9-10 times more at risk for suicide than the general population
• Most at risk within 90 days after discharge from a hospital, especially for a first time discharge
• The risk of suicide is greater after the first episode of psychosis

Violence
• Persons with serious mental illnesses are at increased risk of being victims of violence
• Greater for individuals experiencing their first episode of psychosis
Health Disparities

Treatment Disparities for Communities of Color

- Less access to mental health services than non-minorities
- Often receive care that is poor in quality
- Physicians’ attitudes can be different from those held about people from majority culture
- Those with serious mental illnesses may have less willingness or ability to seek treatment and/or fill prescriptions
Health Disparities

Psychologists Must Be Aware:

- Considerable health disparities for persons with serious mental illnesses
- Smoking and obesity are key factors in producing health disparities for persons with serious mental illnesses
  - Psychologists should encourage people with these conditions to remain in smoking cessation and weight loss intervention programs
- Health disparities for persons with serious mental illnesses are entwined disparities for persons of color
- There are systematic reasons within the United States and mental health systems that produce health disparities (lack of insurance, practitioner bias, etc.)
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mjansen@bayviewbehavioral.org or jansenm@shaw.ca

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