

Head Health

Mental first aid is an often overlooked and stigmatized issue, but one pharmacist is using his own experience to make a difference

By Chris Linville



After experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder following a 2013 tornado, Clark Bishop began focusing on helping others with mental health issues.

May 20, 2013 is a day residents of Moore, Okla., aren't likely to forget. A tornado, stretching up to a mile wide and packing maximum winds of 210 miles per hour, hit Moore, killing 24 people and injuring 377.

Clark Bishop, PharmD, pharmacy manager at Hutton Pharmacy in Blackwell, Okla., has vivid memories of that day. What he experienced in its aftermath shaped his pharmacy career, leading him to become a certified instructor of Mental Health First Aid. And it changed his attitude about people suffering from mental health-related issues.

HITTING CLOSE TO HOME

Bishop was living in Moore, a suburb south of Oklahoma City, on that May afternoon. He was only about 200 yards away, huddled in his garage storm shelter, when the tornado came through. He was not injured, and after the storm passed, he offered to provide a helping hand to others. What he experienced in the tornado's aftermath left a deep impression.

"It's hard to explain, but it wasn't just what I saw," he says. "It was what I

saw, what I heard, what I smelled, what I tasted, and what I felt. Every sense was overwhelmed by chaos and things I had never experienced before."

Over the next few months, Bishop felt that something was off, but he wasn't sure what it was. He's since learned that when people suspect they might have a mental health issue, they are often reluctant to address it. The negative stereotypes often produce barriers to admitting the problem and getting treatment. Only 41 percent of people living with a mental illness get the help they need, Bishop says.

For Bishop, the symptoms progressed and couldn't be ignored. "Things were changing in me, and I wasn't particularly aware of it," he says, "until things started getting pointed out to me, to the point where you wake up and say, 'I'm really dealing with something here.'"

Bishop was eventually diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. But he was hesitant to talk about it, because he thought it was only

associated with events such as military combat.

But he got help. "I did a combination of drug therapy and cognitive behavior therapy, and research shows that those two in combination are the best way to treat and ultimately overcome most mental health issues, including the one that I suffered from," he says.

A SERIOUS ISSUE

According to Mental Health First Aid USA, one in five Americans has a mental illness, 70 percent of Americans with depression are in the workforce, and 35 million workdays are lost every year due to mental illness. Additionally, the cost of untreated mental illness in the U.S. is \$105 billion annually, mostly due to lost productivity.

Mental health issues are often apparent to pharmacists, Bishop says. "We see that when we look at our top 200 drugs, when we see those anti-depressants and those anti-anxiety medications that are very prevalent, which tells us something. But we aren't trained as pharmacists

Fast Facts: Hutton Pharmacy, Blackwell, Okla.

Established:	1945
Management:	Clark Bishop, PharmD, pharmacy manager
Products & Services:	Prescriptions, immunizations, vitamins and supplements, skin care, OTC and herbals, medication therapy management, delivery services
NCPA member since:	2013
Professional:	Member of the Oklahoma Pharmacists Association and the National Community Pharmacists Association; current Pharm4Me Champion representing the University of Oklahoma in the American Association for Colleges of Pharmacy; Certified Mental Health First Aid Trainer through Mental Health First Aid USA
Education:	PharmD, University of Oklahoma College of Pharmacy

By the Numbers

According to Mental Health First Aid USA:

- One in five Americans has a mental illness.
- Seventy percent of Americans with depression are in the workforce.
- Thirty-five million workdays are lost every year due to mental illness.
- The cost of untreated mental illness in the U.S. is \$105 billion annually, mostly due to lost productivity.



or pharmacy staff to properly help those with mental health issues.”

Bishop graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a sociology degree in 2007. He worked as a manager for a large chain pharmacy and it was there that he developed his passion for pharmacy. He enrolled at the University of Oklahoma College of Pharmacy, graduating in May 2016. Since then he has been at Hutton Pharmacy, focusing on upgrading the store and providing additional services to join the CPESNSM Network. The pharmacy, located about 15 miles south of the Kansas state line, has eight staff members. The pharmacy dispenses almost 200 prescriptions per day.

As Bishop implemented pharmacy initiatives, his business partner David George received an email from Kevin Day, PharmD, NCPA associate director for strategic initiatives, asking if he knew of any pharmacists who might be interested in applying for a

grant to attend a program on Mental Health First Aid training. George forwarded the email to Bishop.

“When I got the email it really resonated with me,” Bishop says. “As pharmacists, especially after we started doing immunizations, we were all required to get first aid and CPR training for the physical side, but first aid for the mental health side is rarely mentioned.”

GETTING TRAINED

Bishop received the grant and in November traveled to Las Vegas for a five-day session on Mental Health First Aid training, conducted by Mental Health First Aid USA (www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org), which is managed by the National Council for Behavioral Health. Bishop’s expenses were paid by a grant from the Community Pharmacy Foundation.

The program included eight-hour sessions each day. After the first day, he was certified in Mental Health

First Aid. It takes five full days to become certified as a first aid trainer, so the next four days were spent on additional exercises and training. Bishop says there are web elements and resources that need to be used to stay certified, similar to CE.

The training “is not meant to treat or diagnose,” Bishop says. “It’s that first line of defense. It would be a very valuable tool for every community pharmacy.”

The 18 people in Bishop’s class included correctional facility employees, a university psychology professor, behavioral therapists, and even a retail manager from a small non-pharmacy chain.

He wasn’t sure what to expect of the training. “Being in the health care world, I knew some of it because of the drugs we used to treat mental health,” he says. “But it was heavily focused on just what exactly the issues can be, what they stem from,



Bishop, manager of Hutton Pharmacy, has been implementing mental health first aid into the business.

and what the risk factors are.”

He also learned strategies on how to approach people and talk to them. He was surprised that the instructors stressed bluntness when speaking to somebody who might have suicidal thoughts.

“Research shows that if you come straight out and ask, ‘Hey, are you considering dying by suicide or are you suicidal at all,’ the chances of them actually going through it are much smaller than if you didn’t say anything at all,” Bishop says.

IMPLEMENTING IN THE PHARMACY

Now that he’s certified as a Mental Health First Aid trainer, Bishop must teach at least six Mental Health First Aid programs in his first year. He plans

The ALGEE Method

The Mental Health First Aid USA training program stresses five key points, using the acronym **ALGEE**.

- A** – Assess for risk of suicide or harm
- L** – Listen nonjudgmentally
- G** – Give reassurance and information
- E** – Encourage appropriate professional help
- E** – Encourage self-help and other support strategies

NCPA has certified the Mental Health First Aid program for eight hours of continuing education for both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. Sign up for a course today at www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org. There is no additional charge for the CE.

to focus in Oklahoma and is working with the University of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Pharmacists Association to explore training opportunities.

Of course, Bishop is eager to implement what he’s learned in his own pharmacy.

Bishop’s first step will be to train his staff in Mental Health First Aid, so when he’s not available, there will be capable people who can step in if needed.

He’s already seeing results, he says. He has a longtime customer who he sensed might be having some issues, and he offered to help in any way he could. The next time the customer came in, Bishop says he put his plan into action, and the customer completely opened up. Bishop gave him a card for a local mental health specialist, and that customer is now receiving professional help.

“All I did was follow that action plan to a T — it wasn’t something I came up with, but it was exactly what I was trained to do,” he says. “I stayed in my lane as a Mental Health First Aid provider. I did not diagnose, I

didn’t tell him he had a problem, I just followed the plan and told him it might be something he might want to look into. It works, and I got to see it firsthand.”

It’s important, he says, to show grace and dignity toward others and especially to those who might seem to be struggling with mental health issues.

“We need to try our best,” he says. “I think we’ll come out ahead, and probably better our business, too. It’s going to do nothing but create goodwill. That’s what we are as independent pharmacists. We are part of the community. Our best service is just being there for them. Just saying hi, and knowing their name when they walk in.” ■

Chris Linville is managing editor of *America’s Pharmacist*.

For more information about Clark Bishop’s experiences, and to learn more about Mental Health First Aid training, contact him at 580-363-2137 or email clark@huttonpbarm.com.