

Counselor addresses eating disorders

In the March 21, 2002 issue of *The Voice*, a brief item on page two provided information on how eating disorders are treated. This information — gathered from a registered nurse at Geisinger Medical Center — was incomplete. It seems as though in the interest of space, a very condensed and narrow version of treatment was presented.

For example, it was implied that all eating-disordered individuals require lengthy inpatient treatment in a hospital setting. This is not true. A variety of treatment options are available and many people can greatly benefit from outpatient counseling and related medical and nutritional support and monitoring.

Eating disorders occur at different levels; only the more severe ones require lengthy and intensive inpatient treatment in order to medically stabilize the patient.

Also, the mini-article made no distinction between the various types of eating disorders, the main ones being anorexia and bulimia. There are differences in how these disorders present themselves, as well as different diagnostic criteria.

Body image distortion, low self-esteem and difficulty expressing feelings are common in both anorexia and bulimia. However, anorexia is characterized by severely restricted

food intake and significant weight loss, and bulimia involves binge eating and purging behaviors. These primary indicators are accompanied by several psychological symptoms.

Furthermore, counseling is an important aspect of the treatment process and it was not even mentioned. Eating disorders are serious and complicated conditions and warrant a greater explanation than that provided in the brief item in *The Voice*. I will limit my comments to the issue of treatment since that was the original topic.

Eating disorder treatment is most effective when approached from a bio-psycho-social (body, mind and environment) perspective. That is, treating the whole person within the social context and encouraging positive lifestyle changes.

Counseling is very helpful, whether one is an inpatient or an outpatient because this is where a person can explore how the problematic eating behaviors developed (i.e., usually a combination of factors such as poor self-image, family issues, societal pressures and cultural views on beauty, distorted thinking, issues of control and perfectionism, etc.) and seek realistic solutions (i.e., healthy coping strategies). Counseling can take place in individual, group and/or family formats.

Nutrition education and medication are often useful adjuncts to counseling.

Bloomsburg University's Center for Counseling and Human Development provides information, counseling and consultation on the topic of eating disorders, as well as other psychological issues. If you think you have a problem with food, weight or body image, please come see us for a confidential appointment where a counselor will evaluate your condition and provide you with treatment options.

Contrary to popular belief, seeking help is a strength — not a weakness. If you are concerned about a friend who may have an eating disorder, you may contact us for information and suggestions. Denial of the problem is common in individuals with eating disorders, so don't be surprised if your friend chooses not to accompany you to the appointment — come without him or her.

We can be reached at ext. 4255 and are located in room 240 at the Student Services Center.

A useful resource for more information on eating disorders is Renfrew, a renowned organization and residential treatment facility in Philadelphia with other branch locations nationwide (telephone: 1-877-367-3383 or 1-800-RENFREW;

web site: www.renfrew.org).

Two educational books for the lay person that I highly recommend are "The Eating Disorder Sourcebook: A Comprehensive Guide to the Causes, Treatments, and Prevention of Eating Disorders," by Carolyn Costin (Lowell House, 1997, \$17.00 paperback) and "Surviving an Eating Disorder: Strategies for Family and Friends, Revised and Updated," by Michele Siegel, Judith Brisman, and Margot Weinschel (Harper Collins, 1997, \$13.00 paperback).

Additionally, the March 2002 issue (Vol. 33, No. 3) of the American Psychological Association's magazine, *Monitor on Psychology*, includes a cover story and special 14-page section on eating disorder treatment.

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Editor's Note: The item being referred to is "The Plague of the Week." Its purpose is to inform students of illnesses on campus and provide a brief overview of specific health issues. Students are encouraged to research the issues more thoroughly.

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