Voices for Recovery

September 10, 2012 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

The term “recovery” often appears in relation to fighting addictions. But what exactly is recovery, why is it important and how is it promoted?

A 2007 consensus panel convened by the Betty Ford Clinic described recovery as “a voluntarily maintained lifestyle characterized by sobriety, personal health and citizenship.” Up until that point, there hadn’t been a widely agreed upon definition.

To spread awareness of recovery as an alternative to addiction, the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has designated September as National Recovery Month.

This awareness month promotes the benefits of prevention, treatment and recovery from substance use and mental disorders. It celebrates people in recovery, as well as their treatment and service providers. It promotes the message that recovery is possible.

“Join the Voices for Recovery: It’s Worth It” is this year’s theme. It emphasizes the fact that recovery can be tough, but the benefits it provides to individuals, their families and their communities are important.

The belief that behavorial health is essential to overall health is an underlying message of this awareness month. For many people with viral hepatitis, for example, recovery is widely considered a component of viral hepatitis management.

Data from the 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health reveal the impact of substance use and mental disorders on various communities, including minorities.

Illicit drug use was higher among African Americans (9.5 percent) than the national average (7.9 percent). The rate of need for treatment for illicit drug use was higher for blacks (4.4 percent) than the national average (2.9 percent). In 2010, 19.7 percent of African Americans had a mental illness and 4.4 percent had a serious mental illness.

Binge alcohol use was higher among Latinos (26.3 percent) than the national average (24.5 percent). Latino adults born in the United States had higher rates of substance use than Latino adults who were foreign born. In 2010, 18.3 percent of all Latinos had a mental illness and 5.6 percent had a serious mental illness.

If you’re interested in promoting National Recovery Month in your community, SAMHSA has created a toolkit to make it easier. It also provides instructions on media outreach, as well as resources to help plan and prepare events. Materials are also available in Spanish.

Go to recoverymonth.gov to access the toolkit. Also available on the site is the “Voices for Recovery” archive of people sharing their inspirational personal stories, recounting both their struggles and successes with recovery.

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