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Tri-City Medical Center: Helping Older Adults Manage Their Mental Health

Mental health includes emotional, psychological and social wellbeing.



Tri-City Primary Care offers a wide range of services and resources for physical and mental health in every stage of life.

For older adults, healthy aging involves more than just maintaining wellness, or physical health; it also means focusing on wellbeing, one's happiness and emotional state-of-mind. Mental health affects how a person thinks, feels, acts and copes with life's stressors; it is important at every stage of life, even late adulthood.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, many older adults are at risk for mental health problems, but these issues should not be considered a normal part of aging. Studies show that most older adults feel satisfied with their lives, even though they may have more physical healthcare problems.

Reyzan Shali, MD, a board-certified internist at Tri-City Primary Care, enjoys seeing older patients in her practice as they remind her of her parents and grandparents. "I have the greatest respect for seniors as they have done so much for our families, communities and country during their lifetimes, and we owe it to them to take good care of them."

As a mature Kurdish woman from Iraq, Dr. Shali understands how people's age, ethnicity and culture may impact their attitudes about mental health. "For many, mental health is still stigmatized and frowned upon; it's something you hide under the rug," said Dr. Shali. "I am trying to

help them change their mindset so that they are more open to talking about their feelings with me or a counselor."

Never has this been more important than now. A recent AARP study found that most older adults say the pandemic has created emotional issues including increased sadness, depression, worry, anger, loneliness and anxiety. Consequently, the emotional impact has led some older adults to increase positive and negative coping habits, such as meditation or unhealthy eating, respectively.

"Even though the pandemic has caused a great deal of stress for everyone, it has also created an opportunity where people are now willing to admit that they are struggling with their wellbeing and need help," said Dr. Shali. "This is a major step forward. I welcome these conversations with my older patients and reinforce that it's perfectly nor-

mal to feel this way, as we are all human. Additionally, there has been an increase in telehealth visits because of the pandemic, so I am now able to see more older patients who might not be able to come to the office. Most importantly, I want to assure them that mental health issues can be treated."

Dr. Shali works with each patient to determine the best course of treatment. She often refers her older patients to Tri-City's Behavioral Health Services for outpatient care. A therapist there may recommend that the patient could benefit from medication. She will discuss this option with her patient, and if they both agree, prescribe and manage the patient's medications to improve wellbeing.

"I care deeply about my older patients, as they are someone's grandmother or father," said Dr. Shali. "It's just as important that I help them

manage their mental health as physical health, as the two go hand-in-hand. They must be in a good place emotionally or they are not going to eat healthy and exercise, which means their diabetes and blood pressure numbers go up."

"I am a big proponent of a plant-based diet, which studies have shown can significantly improve depression and overall mental health," added Dr. Shali. "Through my blog series, I share this type of information with the hope that readers will better understand the strong connection between wellness and wellbeing as we age."

To learn more about the Primary Care Services offered at Tri-City Medical Center, call 855-222-8262 to be referred to a Tri-City Primary Care physician.

To learn more about Tri-City Medical Center's Behavioral Health Services, call 760-940-5051 or fill out a telemedicine appointment request form.

As part of its COASTAL Commitment Initiative, Tri-City Medical Center partners with NAMI San Diego, a local chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, call 988, the new national emergency hotline that will replace the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number.



Dr. Reyzan Shali, Internal Medicine Physician at Tri-City Primary Care