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COMMENTARY

Holiday mental wellness

As the holidays approach, those of us in the tourist economy know that long hours, mandatory overtime, thousands of guests, and time away from our families and friends will increase the stress and anxiety in our community. While many of us focus on staying physically healthy this time of year, we often forget the importance of mental wellness and the impact it has on our overall health. Maintaining a positive outlook on life while practicing healthy coping skills can give us that extra boost needed when we are feeling weary. This holiday season we encourage you to be mindful of your own mental wellness, and observant of those around you and how they are doing.

Twenty percent of adults in our community will experience a mental health or substance use problem each year, but less than half of those individuals will receive treatment. The most common mental health problems are anxiety and depression. If you are concerned about a friend or family member, it is OK and important to reach out to them. Simply asking them if everything is OK is often sufficient to start a conversation that may set them on a path toward recovery and mental wellness. Professional help may be needed for some individuals, but often early recognition of the symptoms of depression or anxiety and implementing some healthy coping strategies is adequate to help an individual. You can find information about the signs and symptoms of a mental health condition on the website for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (nami.org).

While it is a myth that suicides increase during the holidays, the reality that someone we know who is suffering from severe depression or anxiety is experiencing thoughts of suicide is all too true. It is important to take all threats of suicide or self-harm seriously, and while it is not an easy question to ask, if you are worried that someone is considering suicide, ask the question directly, "Are you having thoughts of suicide? Are you thinking of killing yourself?" If they answer yes, it is important to ensure their safety. Do not leave them alone. Assist them in getting the help they need. You can find information about how to help on the website for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (afsp.org). You can contact the Colorado Crisis Services

at 844-493-8255, text "Talk" to 38255 or call the National Suicide Prevention Line at 1-800-273-TALK. You also can text "HOME" to 741741 or call 911.

PAUL REICH
GUEST COMMENTARY

Due to the continued rise in need and a shortage of mental health services, Tri-County Health Network (TCH Network) has made this a top priority in our program development. TCH Network already conducts free Mental Health First Aid classes in the community and teletherapy in our local schools, but in the coming year we plan to offer new programming through NAMI. This will include community-based classes with extensive curricula to help those experiencing a mental health issue (or persons playing a supportive role), as well as public events for discussions and presentations on mental health topics. By increasing the variety and frequency of programming related to mental health, we hope to provide practical skills that people can use to navigate mental health crises, improve connectivity to appropriate resources, and reduce stigma through education and heightened awareness.

On Dec. 3 TCH Network launched our "12 Days of Mental Wellness," highlighting different mental health resources available in our community. We encourage you to check us out on Facebook and Twitter to see our "12 Days of Mental Wellness" and daily videos that highlight community leaders and their efforts to maintain mental wellness.

This year, TCH Network is participating in Telluride Gives with the goal of raising money to expand mental health services in the Telluride area. We ask you to donate to the TCH Network on Telluride Gives Day (Dec. 14) to address the serious mental health needs our community faces.

Mental illness is common, but mental wellness is more common. Although most of us will not experience a mental health disorder this year, it is likely that we know someone who will. Let's join together in support of our loved ones and work to reduce the stigma around mental illness.

If you have questions or want to know more about Tri-County Health Network programs, call 970-708-7096 or visit tchnetwork.org.

Paul Reich is the behavioral health program manager at Tri-County Health Network. You may contact him via email at pmbh@tchnetwork.org