



MEDIA ADVISORY
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Putting the Spotlight on Mental Health Stigma in BC Emergency Rooms

Calgary, January 4, 2011 –The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) has partnered with B.C.'s Interior Health Authority to deliver special workshops which aim to reduce stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness amongst health care providers. Understanding the Impact of Stigma was shared with emergency room workers in seven hospitals and community clinics throughout B.C. including Castlegar, Kelowna, Williams Lake, Kamloops, Penticton, Salmon Arm and Cranbrook.

Niki Hylins, artist and mother of two who also has bipolar disorder, shares her personal experience at the workshops about the stigma she encountered in the health care setting.

“Stigma within the health care system has a powerfully harmful effect,” says Hylins. “On the flip side, intelligent, caring treatment can have a positive effect on patients. That is immeasurably more powerful.”

Cheryl Whittleton, Team Leader of Emergency at BC's Castlegar and District Health Centre who piloted the program, says Hylins' message had a significant impact at the workshops. “The majority of participants felt that her presentation was very powerful and it brought some to tears,” she says.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada's 10-year anti-stigma/anti-discrimination initiative, Opening Minds, is working with organizations across the country to evaluate and identify programs that are successful in changing behaviours and attitudes toward those who suffer from mental illness. Understanding the Impact of Stigma utilizes contact based education, a method which has been proven to help create attitude and behavioural change through the sharing of personal stories.

This year, seven million Canadians will experience a mental health problem. Stigma is a major barrier preventing many people from seeking help.

See attachments for Niki Hylins' story and picture.

About the Mental Health Commission of Canada

The Mental Health Commission of Canada is a catalyst for transformative change. Our mission is to work with stakeholders to change the attitudes of Canadians toward mental health problems and to improve services and support. Our goal is to help people who live with mental health problems lead meaningful and productive lives. The Mental Health Commission of Canada is funded by Health Canada.

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For Interviews with Cheryl Whittleton or Micheal Pietrus contact:

Kristin Bernhard, Communication Specialist

Office: 403 385-4066

Cell: 403 620-2339

kbernhard@mentalhealthcommission.ca