

Chronic Disease

Having to deal with a long-term, possibly lifelong, disease is very challenging for multiple reasons. Not only are there the associated medical challenges, such as dealing with symptoms, taking medication, dealing with side effects, eating the right foods, and maintaining healthy habits, there are also many social challenges.

Having to deal with a chronic disease can be uncomfortable and sometimes outright embarrassing. A person with psoriasis may get frustrated having to constantly explain their patches of scaly skin. A person with ulcerative colitis may need to suddenly run to the washroom, which may seem rude or weird to an unknowing friend or coworker. Each individual goes through an everyday struggle, and because they get used to it, it is easy for friends or coworkers to forget about it.

At the start of most chronic diseases, the individual gets sick and is unsure why they are sick. Once they get a diagnosis, it comes with the word “chronic”, which unfortunately subliminally means “incurable.” This is incredibly difficult to hear and to accept because the individual’s life cannot go back to the way it was before. Those with chronic disease often feel like the disease they cannot get rid of had taken over their life, but most do get used to it and it becomes a part of their “new normal.”

However, some may believe that a particular chronic disease doesn’t exist and that the pain experienced by the individual is not real because oftentimes the disease is invisible. This thinking completely ignores or disregards the lived experience of the individual and leads them to feel rejected or blamed.

When dealing with this stigma, those with chronic diseases need to be careful who they disclose their disease to, and they need to decide whether or not they want to hide the disease and try to appear “normal.” Some of these diseases are incredibly personal and awkward to talk about, so it is important to respect the privacy of those with chronic diseases. Additionally, the stigma from others can lead to self-stigma, where the individual begins to question their personal value rather than the stereotypes placed on them, or they blame something on themselves that should be blamed on the disease. This is very difficult to deal with on top of the disease itself.

Whether it is an irritable bowel syndrome, a mental illness, cancer, diabetes, obesity, or some other chronic disease, you don’t need to understand what the person is going through to help them. You don’t need to solve their problems for them and you don’t need to find the silver lining. Sometimes the best thing to say is “Wow, that sounds frustrating.” or “I don’t know what to say, I’m just glad you feel comfortable telling me.” Try to be open and nonjudgmental. It’s only awkward if you make it awkward. In the end, individuals with chronic disease want to be accepted and supported.

Sources: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rr8wliypS_g
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