

How To  
**Combat Stigma**

Within the Mental Health System

Human Resources

✓ Psychiatrists

Administrators

Finance Directors

Quality Improvement

Customer Service

Program Supervisors

Front Line Workers

Peer Support Specialists

Created by the  
Michigan Anti-Stigma  
Steering Committee  
June 2011



320 South Walnut  
Lansing, MI 48933  
(517) 335-3845  
(517) 335-4798 fax  
[www.michigan.gov/mdch](http://www.michigan.gov/mdch)

**Combating  
Stigma**

IN THE MENTAL  
HEALTH SYSTEM

PSYCHIATRISTS

**LOOK  
CLOSER**

...

See me for  
who I am

## What Every Psychiatrist Should Know About Stigma

### REMEMBER THAT PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS . . .

- Want the same things everyone else wants and have the same capacities that everyone else has.
- Experience love, hate, joy, and pain, just as everyone else.
- Get sick. When they complain of somatic symptoms, there usually is a medical explanation.
- Value your honesty more than your agreement.
- Sometimes need your patience and tolerance.
- Know when you care about them.
- Know when you are trying your best.
- Need to know *why* you suggest a particular treatment.
- Want to know what their lab tests mean.
- Value, more than you know, the confidence you have in them.
- May think, when they are sick, that you are one of the most important people in the world. Enjoy it while you can. It's a big responsibility.
- May think you are the worst person in the world—make sure they don't get this one right.
- Always have the potential to go further in their recovery. They often experience dramatic recoveries, sometimes very slowly, sometimes very quickly.
- Want you to respect the relationships they have with their family members—these are different for different families and different cultures.

## What Psychiatrists Can Do to Enhance Recovery and Minimize Stigma

- Support hope and the potential for recovery.
- Celebrate successes in the recovery process, even small ones.
- Orient treatment to the goals and strengths of the consumer.
- Use medication as a tool for achieving the consumer's objectives.
- Support other activities, such as maintenance of health, that are part of the recovery process.
- Examine your own attitudes in order to increase your capacity to assist, without prejudice, persons with whom you work.
- Read the developing research literature on stigma.
- Listen to consumers and families when they describe experiences of stigma.
- Shift our emphasis from psychopathology and symptoms to improving lives.
- Recognize instances of discrimination and educate those who commit it.
- Share with and learn from others about ways to overcome stigma.
- Take a moment to learn about "recovery." Mostly it is about treating persons with Respect—something that good physicians try to do anyway.
- Cultivate qualities of compassion, tolerance and authentic admiration for persons with mental illness.
- Admit when you are wrong.

