

- Health

Don't underestimate the value of exercise

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When we discuss mental health and ways to improve it, we often end up speaking about the shortages, the wait times and the lack of professional services. But through my extensive journey, both the process and attempts at therapeutic healing, I have discovered what I have come to learn is a very key element that is, sadly, often overlooked.

In many health services that deal with all things physical, there is a multitude of things put in place to maximize the recovery period. For example, after one has been in a motor vehicle accident, there is a well-regimented recovery plan that is followed by a whole host of health-care professionals. This includes your GP, your surgeon if necessary and a physiotherapist. All these services are offered because we want our fellow citizens to be able to live the best life that can be afforded to them after such a tragedy.

While I'm sure there are improvements to be made within the physical medical system, it is nonetheless more cohesive, and team-orientated than mental health services. For example, if you are going through mental health and addictions, your family doctor does not always have access to your mental health record. This creates a roadblock as it systematically severs communication between two relevant mental health professionals charged with your care. As one might well imagine, this can lead to some pretty serious consequences. It relies on the patient to relay information that may be best communicated by the experts.

Although I am sure that many other areas need to be re-evaluated, one of the most important things that I find missing from the patient's perspective resources that allow for a more comprehensive treatment plan.

For example, and this is fundamental, a fragmented approach to mental health treatment is so dire that is unable to provide new ways forward that will maximize patient outcomes. What I believe is the most overlooked are the benefits of exercise and the lack of professionally qualified persons in this area to administer a fitness plan.

I am, of course, talking about a fitness trainer. There are mountains of evidence showing a correlation between exercise and mental wellness. Physical fitness reduces symptoms of depression, anxiety and many other mental health conditions. Yet, despite good solid science, you will not find a fitness trainer as part of your recovery team.

So, I guess until physical fitness is more broadly recognized as an essential and effective treatment for mental illness, and they put the professionals in place to maximise success, we will have to take the matter into our own hands. Even a brisk 30-minute walk three times a week can do wonders for one's mental health.