

The Missouri Eating Disorders Council (MOEDC) Unveils Its “Myths” Campaign To Break The Silence

ST. LOUIS, MO (OCTOBER 22, 2015)

There is an epidemic. About 10 percent of the population is suffering, most of which are between the ages of 13 and 23. Of those suffering, 20 percent will die. It is time to get real about eating disorders.

The Missouri Eating Disorders Council (MOEDC) is committed to ending the stigma and myths surrounding eating disorders, the most fatal of mental illnesses, by unveiling its new “Myths” public service campaign to break the silence shrouding this nationwide problem. The campaign consists of PSA broadcast spots, billboards, social media, and other tactics to raise awareness and combat widely held misunderstandings.

“Eating disorders are highly secretive and stigmatized mental illnesses,” said Annie Seal, Chairwoman of MOEDC, whose daughter is in recovery. “There are many myths surrounding eating disorders. People often think it’s a phase, a choice or a diet that’s out of control. The secrecy perpetuates the illness leaving those suffering and their families confused and under supported.”

Eating disorders are the most serious of all mental illnesses. While highly treatable, they also have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness due to the secrecy and stigmas surrounding them. The most vulnerable population is women between ages 12-24, but all people, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or economic status are affected. In fact, boys, and women over 40, are the two fastest growing populations suffering from an eating disorder.

While the public has some understanding of some of the types of eating disorders, such as Anorexia Nervosa, the discourse is mostly riddled with misconceptions such as:

- Eating disorders are a choice.
- Men don’t get eating disorders.
- Eating disorders are a fad.
- Eating disorders are not serious. People will grow out of them.

All of these are widely believed. And all of them are false. These myths are not only wrong. They are dangerous. And they are why Seal says we need to start talking.

“Silence keeps us from interacting with an eating disorder as an illness, just as we would cancer or the flu,” she said. “The stigma and secrecy around eating disorders runs deep and has not only allowed the disease to flourish, but has also kept eating disorders underfunded in national research efforts.”

And like many illnesses, research shows that early intervention drives successful treatment outcomes. In fact, the earlier you identify it and begin treatment, the better your chances of survival.

“Early intervention and aggressive treatment result in much better treatment outcomes and more frequently result in full recovery,” Seal said. “Without treatment people will tend to get very ill very quickly, often resulting in serious chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, kidney disease, osteoporosis, brain damage and serious dental conditions. All of this can be avoided if complete treatment is available during the early stages of the illness.”

The misconceptions need to be corrected for early intervention.

“We have to drive awareness for this, the most fatal of all mental illnesses, particularly since this illness affects children and young adults,” Seal said. “I often see parents minimizing the serious nature of the illness or not fighting for complete treatment — there can be this thought that someone does this to themselves as opposed to this is a very serious, biologically-based illness that is not a choice. Education is power with eating disorders.”

Let’s break the silence. Get the real facts. Get real help. Learn more at moedc.org.

About Missouri Eating Disorders Council

Missouri Eating Disorders Council (MOEDC), under the auspices of the Missouri Department of Mental Health and in collaboration with organizations and stakeholders, such as the Department of Health and Senior Services, Elementary and Secondary Education and Higher Education, provide eating disorders education, awareness and treatment provider training initiatives throughout the state. MOEDC promotes increased access to treatment throughout the state of Missouri and focuses on evidence-based treatment that is supported by clinical practice guidelines (i.e., considering the relevant scientific literature, as well as the potential harms and benefits of treatment for each case).

The MOEDC provides information and support for the entire eating disorders spectrum, including anorexia nervosa (AN), bulimia nervosa (BN), binge eating disorder (BED), and atypical eating

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disorders called Other Feeding and Eating Disorders (OSFED). The major diagnostic categories included in DSM-5.

The MOEDC's goal is to employ fact based, best-in-class materials and strategic partnerships to bring focus and understanding to the serious, yet highly treatable, nature of this disease. For more information on the MOEDC, please contact Annie Seal at (314) 591-3341, send mail to P.O. Box 50071, St. Louis, MO. 63105 or visit moedc.org.