

Learning how to face her eating disorder with courage

by Lauren in Colorado

July 7, 2007 was the best and the worst day of my entire life. After spending a week and a half in a medically-induced coma, I awoke to learn that I had walked away from everything and everyone I had ever loved or cared for. With absolutely no memory of the nearly fatal suicide attempt that took me through complete kidney and liver failure, I came to learn that the lies of my eating disorder had convinced me I was not worth the air I needed to breathe.

As scary and heartbreaking as that information was, the fact that I was alive after such an ordeal ripped me from myself and forced me to see the reality of the manner in which mental health is neglected.

My eating disorder began when I was 11-years-old, following my family's relocation. The disorder affected every area of my life. If I was not locked in my bedroom, too ashamed or depressed to come out, I was out with friends brooding over the number of calories in the meal I was about to consume.

At the age of 16, treatment became a necessity. However, many of the doctors and other skilled professionals I came into contact with were very ill-educated regarding eating disorders and their treatment. Many doctors did not take my eating disorder seriously because, medically, I was stable or I was not emaciated like the textbook anorexic. I was at a stable weight therefore my insurance company limited the amount of treatment I could receive. This lack of consideration for my mental health condition allowed my eating disorder to thrive as I did not receive proper treatment.

By age 24, I was in and out of the emergency room on a weekly basis because my medical health was so unstable due to my eating disorder behaviors. During one of these hospital stays, my experience with treatment and doctors convinced me that I was never going to get well, and that the rest of my life would be emergency rooms, IVs, judgment, and shame. These thoughts brought me to suicide that day while I lay in my hospital bed.

After a miraculous recovery from the suicide attempt, which resulted in complete kidney and liver failure it was time to seek treatment for the root of the problem: my eating disorder. Since I had been in treatment prior to this, my family and I knew that it would be a tedious process to get the proper help covered through insurance. Many insurance companies refuse to pay for residential treatment of eating disorders because it is very costly. However, if more insurance companies would pay for the proper treatment of eating disorders the first time, they would not see such a high cost in treating eating disorder victims due to repeat treatments..

My battle to get treatment paid for took my father's attention away from his full-time job every day from 7 in the morning until 6 at night for many weeks. His time was necessary, due to the current regulations of insurance companies regarding mental health treatment, to get my case to the proper authorities in order to get the help I needed paid for. However necessary the process was at that time, it is ridiculous that a family member must argue the necessity of treatment for an obvious problem with ANYONE, let alone an insurance company whose burden is to pay for such treatment. I assure you, had my problem been cancer, my family would not have known such turmoil.

I spent seven months at the treatment facility my family and I selected, and it was the best experience of my life. From learning how to eat to gaining courage to face my disorder head on, the experience taught me that my mental health issues were nothing to be ashamed of, and that they certainly were nothing to hide.

Unfortunately, many health professionals are not educated as to how to handle mental diseases such as eating disorders, but with the work of Mental Health America and other grass roots organizations like them, this will not be true for long.