

The Virgin Islands Consortium

DOH To Host Workshops In Recognition Of Mental Health Month

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ST. CROIX -- The Department of Health's (D.O.H.), Division of Mental Health Alcoholism and Drug Dependency Services is celebrating Mental Health Month throughout May, D.O.H. announced Tuesday. This year's theme, "Risky Business", highlights the importance of knowing when behaviors and habits can be unhealthy.

The theme is also a call to educate oneself and others about habits and behaviors such as compulsive sex, recreational drug use, obsessive internet use, excessive spending, or disordered exercise patterns that can increase the risk of developing or exacerbating mental illnesses, D.O.H. says.

The department will be hosting a series of workshops and activities in the St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John districts for the community.

Some topics include: PORNIFIED: How Pornography is Impacting the Brain and Transforming Society, A Providers Introduction to Substance Abuse Treatment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Individuals, Art Therapy and Expression, Into the Light-Recovering from Substance Abuse, and many others.

"It is important to understand that mental health is something we should take care of everyday, just like physical health. Making healthy decisions such as eating balanced meals, exercising, engaging in stress reduction activities, taking your vitamins, and getting enough rest are all ways to promote good mental health. It is also important to understand early symptoms of mental illness and know when certain behaviors are potentially signs that one needs additional support with mental healthcare," said Berlina Wallace-Berube, director of the Division of Mental Health, Alcoholism and Drug Dependency Services. "We need to speak up early and educate people about risky behavior and its connection to mental illness—and do so in a compassionate, nonjudgmental way."

When you or someone you love is dealing with a mental health concern, sometimes it is a lot to handle. It is important to remember that mental health is essential to everyone's overall health and well-being, and mental illnesses are common and treatable.

People experience symptoms of mental illnesses differently—and some engage in potentially dangerous or risky behaviors to avoid or cover up symptoms of a potential mental health problem. Sometimes people—especially teenagers to young adults—struggling with mental health concerns develop habits and behaviors that increase the risk of developing or exacerbating mental illnesses, or that could be signs of mental health problems themselves. Untreatable behaviors can disrupt someone's mental health and potentially lead them down a path towards crisis, according to D.O.H.

Mental Health Month was started 68 years ago by Mental Health America, to raise awareness about mental health conditions and the importance of good mental health for everyone. D.O.H. is encouraging everyone to educate themselves about behaviors and activities that could be harmful to recovery – and to speak up without shame using the hashtag *#riskybusiness* – so that others can learn if their behaviors are something to examine.

D.O.H. says posting with its hashtag is a way to speak up, to educate without judgment, and to share your point of view or story with people who may be suffering and help others figure out if they too are showing signs of a mental illness.

Mental Health America has developed a series of fact sheets which are available at www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may on specific behaviors and habits that may be warning signs of something more, risk factors and signs of mental illness, and how and where to get help when needed. Mental Health America has also created an interactive quiz at www.mentalhealthamerica.net/whatstoofar to learn from Americans when they think specific behaviors or habits go from being acceptable to unhealthy. We encourage the community to explore these online resources.

For more information call (340)718-1311 ext. 3040 or (340)774-7700 ext. 2116.

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