

Chronicles of a Community Mental Health Nurse: Tuesday Afternoon

Visit # 4 – Deliver weekly medications, ask if she is in the mood for a walk.

She lives with her mother and her stepfather, although she is past middle-aged. She has her own room, and she sleeps ‘till noon if they will let her. She has short, peppered hair, a kind smile, a raspy poetic voice, a slow gait, a nervous gaze, and a tremor in her hands and lips. She prefers to sit and be still. She smokes cigarettes and loves them but tries to quit now and then for her mom. She loves nature and the small creatures that inhabit the earth but is terrified of people. She believes that the people on TV and radio hate her. When fear takes over her body, she can take a pill. Her mother ensures that she doesn’t take too many. She is a poet and artist. Now that she is comfortable with my visits, she insists that we ponder over and admire her old drawings and paintings and read her poetry before working on health-related matters. She dreams of creating a children’s book one day and hopes that I can help her. She agrees to the walk because the sun is out, and she hears the robins singing sweetly, but only out back by the tall trees on the deer trail where we will be safe from the view of her neighbors. One day she will be brave enough to walk to the bus stop. Then she can get her book published and maybe get her smile fixed. She hates her crooked teeth. But she hates the dentist even more. If only she could forget all of that, she says, because what she really wants is to move to the mountains, join an artist commune, write, and create art, sleep whenever she wants, away from all that is so unbearable in her world. She is hopeful. Today, she is hopeful. The walk helps.

Visit # 5 - 3rd attempt, administer antipsychotic injection, see if he will talk today.

He has no phone, so if you want to see him, you show up and hope that he is there and will let you in. You do this every day until he grants you entrance. He wears unusual clothes.

Like over-sized clown glasses, overalls, a woman's woven satchel, and gloves in the summer. He collects objects. He brings lost toys, clothes, street signs, and other items back to his meager, cluttered apartment. Hangs them on the walls or finds a space that isn't occupied. They are his treasures. One of his most prized possessions is full-sized shining armor, the kind that a knight would wear. He keeps it in the corner. No one is sure how he obtained it. He rearranges furniture almost daily. Everything is covered in a thin layer of cigarette ash. The once white carpet is a yellow-brown and is matted with bits of food. The few friends that he has see and hear things too. Things that other people say aren't there. Sometimes he talks; other times, he doesn't. Sometimes he just nods yes or no. Sometimes he only responds to the other voices that he is hearing. Today he talks. Some of it is clear, but most of it is not. There is a tone of sadness, so I inquire. In an unprecedented ray of clarity, he reveals that people make him sad when they look at him strangely and ask him to leave. "I just want to be me," he says.

Tuesday is done. Breathe. Reflect. Smile. Notice. Integrate. Today...was a beautiful day.

By Laurie Sewell-Muller

Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), graduating 5/2022. CON Omaha Division