

Five *on*
Friday

Musings on Mental Health

[May is Mental Health Awareness Month](#)

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As Americans don their swim suits and dust off their bbq's this weekend, it is worth noting that May is Mental Health Awareness month. Perhaps not a coincidence that May also ends with Memorial Day, which is a time to honor those who have served our country - those same individuals who have very high rates of mental health conditions that we need to do a better job serving in return. So from civilians to service men and women - from each of us as individuals to the global stage - May Mental Health Awareness Month is a reminder that we have come a long way and have a long way to go.



[Photo Credit](#)

Some reflections from my most local data point (me) to the global stage...

1. Raising Individual Awareness: Note to Self. Last week in a therapy session, I was gently but wisely reminded that caring is not the same as understanding. Caring can facilitate understanding; understanding can facilitate caring. Both require listening and sometimes mean that we will hear things we don't like. Increasing mental health awareness (for me) means embracing such growing pains.

2. Raising awareness by training thousands of professionals within the field. [Dr. Aaron T. Beck](#), father of cognitive therapy, dared to challenge the status quo of the field more than 50 years ago. He developed a new model of therapy (CBT) and his work catalyzed an expanded understanding of the mind that propelled the entire field forward. Today, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is practiced around the world. About to celebrate his 95th birthday, he reminded me over lunch this week that if we want to propel the field forward, we have to keep innovating.

3. So what is a city to do? New York City is home to 8.5 million people. With one in five individuals suffering from a mental illness each year, that means 1.7 million adults in New York City alone have mental health challenges. Enter [THRIVE NYC](#), an initiative of Mayor De Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray. THRIVE NYC includes new policies, \$1 billion USD funding, and performance targets for improving the city's approach to preventing and treating mental illness. I salute this truly historic milestone for NYC.

4. US National Policy: [Senate Mental Health Reform Act](#). The 114th US Congress will recess in August, but before they do, Senators Murphy (D-Conn), Alexander (R-Tenn), Murray (D-Wash), and Cassidy (R-La) are aggressively campaigning to pass this new bill. As Bismark said, 'Laws are like sausages, it is better not to see them being made.' But my colleague at Columbia University, [Dr. Maria Oquendo](#), refused to close her eyes and instead participated in a Senate Mental Health Summit this week. It is not clear what compromises will need to be made, but it is on the table, and you can help by spreading the word and writing to your senators.

5. Mental health on the global stage. For the first time ever, the World Bank and World Health

Organizations joined forces this spring to put mental health squarely in the middle of the global health agenda - a huge milestone. But like HIV-AIDS two decades ago, mental health is just beginning to accrue the attention needed globally. Comparing notes and needs across borders, it's fair to say we are all developing countries when it comes to mental health. So...

...you have a few days left to do something in honor of May Mental Health Awareness Month - big or small - make it memorable - make it matter (and enjoy your first summer burgers and bonfires this weekend, too!)