

May is National Mental Health Awareness Month

As dialysis patients, one of the most frequently reported unmet needs is access to mental wellness help and resources. Our biggest initiative for 2023 is to establish a mental wellness program for dialysis patients. While we work on getting that funded and delivered to pilot clinics, I want to share some useful information and ideas for you that you can take advantage of now.

First, because dialysis patients are on Medicare because of ESRD insurance laws, the first thing to be aware of is what does Medicare offer.

From [the Medicare website](#), here is what they offer.

Medicare Part B helps pay for these outpatient mental health services:

- One depression screening per year. The screening must be done in a primary care doctor's office or primary care clinic that can provide follow-up treatment and referrals.
- Individual and group psychotherapy with doctors (or with certain other licensed professionals, as the state where you get the services allows).
- Family counseling, if the main purpose is to help with your treatment.
- Testing to find out if you're getting the services you need and if your current treatment is helping you.
- Psychiatric evaluation.
- Medication management.
- Certain prescription drugs that aren't usually "self administered" (drugs you would normally take on your own), like some injections.
- Diagnostic tests.
- Partial hospitalization.
- A one-time "Welcome to Medicare" preventive visit. This visit includes a review of your possible risk factors for depression.
- A yearly "Wellness" visit. Talk to your doctor or other health care provider about changes in your mental health since your last visit.
- Part B also covers outpatient mental health services for treatment of substance abuse.

They also offer a [booklet that you can download](#) to explore and learn more about how Medicare pays for mental wellness services and where you can find services in your area.

The NIMH also offers a [mental wellness toolkit and other resources that can be accessed](#) and downloaded for your use.

Additionally, I offer you the following suggestions

- **Practice self-care.** This isn't a complicated thing. It can be as easy as making sure you take your phosphate binders as prescribed or getting outside to enjoy some fresh air; or listening to your favorite music and singing or dancing along.
- **Call a friend or family member.** You don't need an excuse to stay in touch. Just pick up the phone and say hello - yes pick up the phone and talk, not text. You will be amazed at the difference it makes.

- **Send someone a card or write a letter.** Do you remember that feeling you got when actual mail came and there was a handwritten letter or note? Recreate that for others and it will come back to you in the joy of doing it and creating that memory for someone else.
- **Consider a mindfulness session or two.** I can assure you it's not weird and it's not difficult. It can be as simple as stopping and breathing. Simply breathing. Not talking. Not reading. Not doing anything except breathing and being aware that you are breathing. called the "breath of life" for a reason. There are a [lot of free apps](#) and a [number of online options](#) if you want a little help to get started or stay motivated.
- **Turn off the social media.** Take a break from it. If you need a distraction, turn on a funny movie that you remember from whenever or read a comic book or children's book.
- And as always I must add **if you're at a certain point**, please CALL 988 or TEXT 741 7

And if you haven't heard it lately, know that YOU MATTER.