

If you are one of the unique individuals who take the time to read this column, you may have considered, at some point, to assess your symptoms of mental illness. If you found yourself devising a plan of how you would quickly mention, in slurred speech of course, these symptoms to your doctor while headed out the door, then you are not alone.

In fact, according to the Surgeon General Report, 80 percent of individuals prefer to receive their behavioral health (including mental health) through their primary care doctor. Not only that, but despite us brilliant therapists being available, 50 percent of all mental health care is delivered solely by primary care physicians.

Personally, I support individuals in meeting this health need by their main doctor. I too live in a small town and worry about confidentiality, being identified as “crazy” and running into my neighbors as I exit a mental health office. I’m also confident in the services that our rural doctors provide—we are lucky that way.

But before you run off to your doc to ask for a depression pill, consider the following: symptom improvement is substantially limited when the only treatment received is medication. And to be fair, the same is true for only receiving therapy. Real improvement comes from engaging in both forms of treatment, medication and therapy.

This is true for adults. However, the rule holds even more true for children. Forty to 50 percent of children with anxiety and depression do not have a response to short term treatment when treated with medication or therapy alone. The combination is the key.

There is little doubt physicians encourage and/or refer patients for therapy when the symptoms warrant a psychotropic prescription. However, the follow-up on behalf of the patient tends to be the greatest challenge.

Keep in mind that when your doctor encourages you to see a counselor, he does not stipulate which counselor you should see. There are hundreds of incredible providers located throughout Northeast Colorado, as well as in Southwest Nebraska.

For a list of providers, visit www.dora.state.co.us.mentalhealth or contact your local office at www.centennialmhc.org for referral information. Offices are identified by region; contacts within each office are linked to email.