

□□□ *The important thing is this: To be able at any moment to sacrifice what we are for what we could become.* □□ □ —Charles DuBois

After six years, this author is making a change. Starting April 1, I will be serving the mental health and addiction needs of those in the Imperial and Ogallala areas through Heartland Counseling. From this point forward, Psychobabble will be a reflection of independent work, and will not be affiliated with any agency.

As I look back over my experience serving these rural communities, I am filled with mixed emotions. My work with the wonderful families, medical providers, human service employees, law enforcement and schools in our area has been so fulfilling to my spirit.

I'm continually amazed at the integrity of our community members, the heart with which they lead their lives, and the commitment they demonstrate to ensuring the best environment for our youth, elderly and everyone in-between. I have witnessed those in despair being supported by the strangers down the street; I have called upon uninvolved volunteers to assist those in crises; I have knocked on the doors of businesses and community groups for donations toward projects that may have had little significance for them.

Not once in six years have my requests been denied. For that, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to live amongst some of the world's finest people; and with pride that these counties are full of individuals who give themselves so freely for the benefit of their neighbor.

Certainly the years have presented challenges, not only to myself but for all of those who believe in the need for improved mental health and substance abuse treatment. State funding has steadily declined in this service area; emergency beds for those with suicidal intentions continue to be cut, resulting in heated competition for a limited resource. These battles are emotionally, physically and financially draining to clients, families, medical personnel, law enforcement, district judges and emergency responders.

Staffing our area with professionals suitable for this line of work is difficult enough without having to require extensive hours, frustration of utilizing an overstressed resource supply and additional work load burden when fellow positions are vacated.

Additionally, our region continues to be contaminated with the stigma around mental illness and addiction; only a small percentage of those who could benefit from professional treatment choose to seek services; employers do not recognize the need for "mental health" vacations; third party payors deny mental health and substance abuse treatment as a covered benefit.

Even within the mental health system, mental health benefit coverage is significantly lacking. (Most community mental health agencies provide a total of three...count them....three therapy sessions for their own therapists. Worse yet, the employee is required to request access to this benefit by receiving authorization by not only their supervisor, but by HR directors and executive directors—making Employment Assistant Programs less than a truly confidential employee benefit).

In regard to these issues, I depart with discouragement. As a nation, state and region, we have a long way to go before mental illness and addiction receives the recognition it warrants.

Grief over the loss of contact with incredible coworkers, board members and key community players is at the forefront of my heart. It is because of them that I enjoyed so much of my work. To all the people that have entered my life though this job, I thank you. I am a better person for having known you and am completely confident that I have learned so much more from you, than you have ever learned from me. Your gift will serve to enhance the lives of my future clients, coworkers, family and friends.

Lastly, I leave CMH with optimism for the continued growth of our communities—in size,

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cultural diversity, economic standing, educational attainment of our youth, family cohesion, public safety, physical health and overall well-being. There are no doubts that we have everything we need within our local reach to be successful.

As for CMH, the counties of Phillips and Sedgwick will be well-served by the local staff. Take advantage of the skills and heart they have to offer. The degree of dedication that each of them—Chris, Kathleen, José, Barry, Sandi, Carly, Dan, Ronnie and Sharon—make available for your benefit is a rarity and a blessing that should not be overlooked.

□ □ □ *Future questions and comments regarding Psychobabble can be sent to rhondagosborne@gmail.com.*