“It’s very difficult not to be ‘them and us’, which I think in this kind of setting is so easy - they are the people who have got mental illnesses and we’re all right.

- British psych social worker

“I just didn’t think about speaking to the doctor because I didn’t want to be sectioned or anything. You know there is a stigma about psychological health. There’s like a black, black cloud and as soon as you sort of fall under it everyone else runs for cover . . . I thought if I said anything to anyone I thought I was going to end up at [local psychiatric hospital] having electric shock treatment”

- (ID 19: male, 23 yrs)
Depression

Classmate: “The worst. I couldn't make myself do anything. I felt so off, I couldn't get a grip. I felt weak and whiny... because no one else seemed to have a problem, ya know? I was so down and then I started failing... but you know what the worst part was?”

T: “What?”

Classmate: “The shame. I felt like I couldn’t tell anyone what I was going through. I just hid it from everyone.”

Things to consider:

• Mental illness as a polarised continuum
• Avoidance of treatment by health care professionals (“A Challenge to Licensing Boards: The Stigma of Mental Illness”)
Classmate: “It’s pretty dark stuff...being hooked on drugs.”
Me: “What did it feel like?”
Classmate: “I don’t know man, like I was in deep. It’s all I thought about. Finding a way to numb myself. And then I needed it to not feel like crap. First thing in my head when I woke up, last thing in my head when I passed out. It made me hate myself so much. And the hate would make me use more drugs. Talk about vicious cycle.”
T: “Do you feel like you’re over it?”
Classmate: “I don’t know if you ever are.”

Things to consider:
• Addiction/Substance abuse as a DSM diagnosis
• Unique stigma: Perception of "self-control"
Schizophrenia

**Patient:** “Demons and angels... Battles with Satan... the usual. Ever since I discovered God, I've had all these battles with Satan... I have to keep trying to cast him away. They're not violent, they're just something I have to do. I wish people would just leave me to it. I try to pick places where we won’t bother anyone but sometimes he [Satan] won’t wait.”

T: “What kind of things do you see?”

**Patient:** “Unearthly like things, creatures, a whole other world.”

**Misconceptions:**
- Of schizophrenia as a homogenous disorder
- Schizophrenia = "split personality" or multiple personality disorder
- Schizophrenia or mental illness = Violence
Clinic staff: “So what kind of medicine are you going into?”

T: “Psychiatry, I’m pretty excited about it.”

Clinic staff: [Horrified face] “What? I wouldn’t want to work with all those crazy people. Aren’t you afraid that you’re going to get hurt?”

Psychopathy and Violence in Mental Health
“The medical profession would benefit from competent colleagues who were comfortable discussing their mental health care. They would help erase the prejudices that arise when seeking such treatment is stigmatized or when mental illness is visible only after a catastrophe […] If we could speak openly with each other, physicians could teach physicians who have not experienced depression how to better diagnose and treat this disease. Though I would not wish the pain of depression on anyone, I am a better physician for my experience, more empathic with this pain, and better equipped to sustain my patients.”

- Dr. Miles

Recommended sources

- “Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness” - William Styron
- TED talk - Elyn Saks
- “Crazy: A Father’s Search Through America’s Mental Health Madness” - Pete Earley
- “What Psychopath Means” - Scott O. Lilienfeld and Hal Arkowitz of The Scientific American

References:

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