

The Bradley *Bulletin*

News and notes for our friends and supporters.

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PROVIDENCE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSIONER CHAMPIONS BRADLEY HOSPITAL

Providence Public Safety Commissioner Steve Paré tugs down the sleeve of his suit jacket to reveal a neon green autism awareness bracelet on his wrist.

"I've had this on for five years—I haven't taken it off," says Steve, who serves on the Bradley Hospital Foundation Board of Trustees.

He wears it to support a colleague's young son, who is on the autism spectrum. The bracelet also symbolizes his dedication to advocating on behalf of children and adolescents with behavioral and mental health disorders.

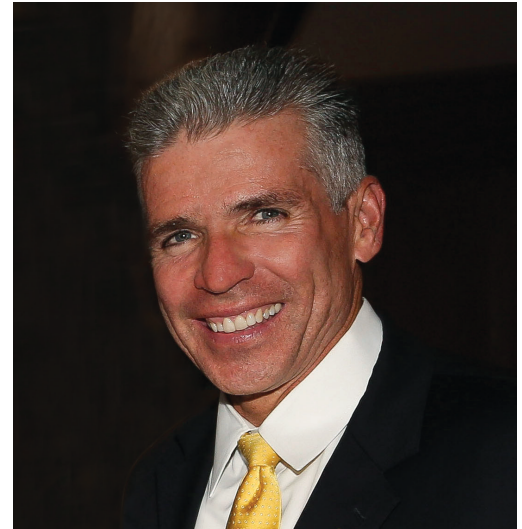
"We still need to come to the realization that, as a community and as a country, a lot of people suffer from mental health issues that either go unnoticed or undiagnosed," he says. "Unfortunately, the stigma around mental health still exists, and that needs to change."

Now 60 years old, Steve started seeing the relationship between mental health and public safety many years ago as a young Rhode Island State Police officer. After 27 years as a state trooper, he became Providence's Public Safety Commissioner in 2011.

"There's nothing more heartbreaking for a police officer than to put a kid into a system that won't get them a positive result," he says. "For many years, we weren't aware and weren't educated about mental health issues."

Fortunately, over the last couple of decades, "things have come a long way." Providence police officers now receive specialized training on mental health and take steps such as shutting off a police car's flashing lights and sirens while responding to a mental health-related call involving a child.

Still, Steve says, more needs to be done on a local and federal level to expand access to mental health and substance use treatment for vulnerable kids and teens. Solutions such as



Steve Paré

Bradley's Hospital's outpatient clinics for co-occurring disorders are essential, he adds.

When he's not working, Steve enjoys traveling with his wife, Jill, a retired Coventry public school teacher, and spending time with his two young-adult daughters and his one-year-old granddaughter.

In fact, one of his daughters, Lauren, works with autistic children at Bradley School South County.

"That's where the work is really done—my daughter and all of the staff that work with these young kids are so inspiring to me," Steve says.

Of course, his role on the Bradley Hospital Foundation Board of Trustees also keeps him busy.

"I'm so impressed with all of the programs at Bradley Hospital, and I'm proud to be on the board," Steve says. "You can turn a life around with these services, and we've got to invest in them. This is our precious future."

UNDERSTANDING EARLY PSYCHOSIS IN ADOLESCENTS

Breaking the stigma around mental illness in general is challenging enough, but breaking the stigma around psychosis is even more difficult. Still, that's exactly what Bradley Hospital and Rhode Island Hospital Clinical Psychologist Elizabeth Thompson, PhD, aims to do. She is currently researching ways to improve screening, education, and treatment of early psychosis in adolescents.

Early psychosis symptoms—which include paranoia, delusions, hallucinations, and social withdrawal—are relatively common among teens receiving mental health care treatment. But they are often underrecognized for various reasons, including stigma and a lack of routine screening among some providers, according to Dr. Thompson. In other words, adolescents tend to be reluctant to speak about experiences with psychosis—if they're even asked about them at all.

"Clinically, the goal is to identify these symptoms early, monitor them over time, and help teens and families build some skills related to coping day-to-day so they can continue to function," she says of her research, much of it conducted at Bradley Hospital.

Ultimately, Dr. Thompson wants teens and their loved ones to know that there is a lot of hope for those who have experienced early psychosis. "It's important to recognize that isolated instances of psychosis will not necessarily lead to a diagnosis of a psychotic disorder such as schizophrenia," she says. "Families hear the word psychosis, which can sound like a scary term, and often think it's going to be a problematic lifelong condition. That's just not the case with most of these kids, especially if we intervene early and get them good mental health care."

SPECIALTY SPOTLIGHT: WHAT IS PSYCHIATRIC NURSING?



Caroline Peguero, RN

With its focus on mental and behavioral health, psychiatric nursing is unique within the field. Unlike a typical med-surge hospital unit, a psychiatric unit is an interactive milieu. An inpatient unit at Bradley Hospital can have as many as 18 children or adolescents at any one time, many with very challenging behaviors.

"Our nurses are charged with managing a dynamic and complex social environment," explains Chief Nursing Officer Mary Sullivan, PhD, MA, BSN. "They must offer a therapeutic atmosphere while maintaining safety for both children and staff. The children in their care are not confined to a room or a bed. It's hard work." Integrating visiting families into the milieu can certainly add to the challenge, but, says Dr. Sullivan, "it is essential to a child's success."

Director of Clinical Nursing Services Susan Lantz, MPA, BSN, describes Bradley Hospital's nurses as "frontline assessment gatherers." They play a leadership role on collaborative care teams, which also include psychiatrists, social workers, and behavioral health specialists. As they approach the care of each individual patient, they must also balance the needs of the milieu. "It's our job to facilitate both individual and group learning on the path to wellness," Susan says.

Developing trusting relationships with patients is another one of the psychiatric nurse's essential skills. "Nurses connect with the patient so they can understand how they're feeling and reacting, and develop a plan of care based on that," Dr. Sullivan says. "A lot of it is being an advocate for kids and trying to see their perspective so you can be their champion."



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