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The Power of the Mind

Written by Jacob Hood.

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The Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) at the University of Texas seeks to provide counseling at lower costs than other health care providers in Austin, while offering students a multitude of helpful services. For example, the CMHC gives students the chance to use their crisis line, participate in group therapy sessions, and get involved with outreach programs such as Suicide Prevention Week.

Even though the CMHC was granted \$3.7 million for the 2016-2017 year – as stated by the executive assistant to the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs – the center is so overwhelmed and understaffed that many students feel that their mental health needs are not being met.

Within the last year alone, the cost of individual counseling sessions at the CMHC has doubled from \$5 to \$10. This small change in price still affected many students using their services, as the sessions became less affordable, and therefore, less accessible.

I was diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder ten months before coming to UT. I came from receiving routine counseling to attending a university where my options for accessible therapy were limited. In the past, therapy gave me control over obsessive thoughts that would spur anxiety and self-destructive, compulsive acts. Upon coming to UT, I felt my control over my mental health begin to slip without easier access to continuous therapy. The funding cuts and the overwhelmed state of the CMHC has left me and other students like myself feeling a similar loss of power.

In a high-stress environment like UT's campus where mental health issues can go unreported, concern over the wellbeing of

students is widespread.

For students across UT's campus, the stress of college life can lead to repression and a loss of control. In the wake of funding cuts to the CMHC and growing concerns over inadequate mental health services nationwide, students are recognizing that our mental health is something with the power to disrupt our lives, but can also help us regain control.

Currently undeclared liberal arts major Shamika Kurian is a strong advocate for proper mental health services on college campuses.

“You never really know what people are going through, so it’s important for anyone to have access to those resources,” Kurian said. She noted that the need for adequate counseling services for UT students has been heavily vocalized by the student body and others, particularly after recent funding cuts to the CMHC.

Fellow UT student Carol Ze-Noah, a government major, supports the implementation of campus services like the CMHC as well.

“Proper health services serve as an outlet for us to discuss our worries with people whose job is it to listen and provide as much help as they can,” Ze-Noah said.

Ze-Noah mentioned that students may have issues they do not feel comfortable discussing, and that it can even be difficult to discuss such topics with close friends and family for fear of being judged or misunderstood.

Another student, who wished to remain anonymous, agreed with Ze-Noah and Kurian.

“College is a huge transition for many students. It can be very difficult to perform academically when your mental health isn’t solid.”

Especially during the initial transition period [from high school to college], the “make-it-or-break-it” mentality on most college campuses can add excess stress to a student’s sense of control over their academic and personal lives. UT students live in a very high-pressure environment, where the goal of success and making the grade can come at a high emotional cost.

“There is power in developing a balance between powerlessness and our innate ability to achieve,” said Ze-Noah.

“Sometimes that can be as easy as getting out of bed in the morning and being a ‘person’. And others, it can be as hard as

realizing that power is derived from knowing that you have the capacity to overcome,” she continued.

Even as these students recognize the sometimes overwhelming nature of psychological distress, they have also noticed how having adequate mental health can give students back a sense of power. For Ze-Noah, she gains control over anxiety issues by practicing meditation and working to perform well academically, both of which give her a much-needed sense of control.

“I find solace in knowing that I have control. It’s nice,” she said.

Kurian’s perspective on the power of control differs from Ze-Noah’s.

“I think mental health can give you confidence, but not as much as it can take it away,” Kurian said. But she has her own way of gaining control- finding coping strategies in her love of playing music and her naturally humorous attitude.

“If I joke about it, [that] takes away the harshness of it sometimes,” she said.

Anonymous answered with complete certainty: “Mental health can absolutely give someone a sense of power.”

However, for them, like other students, gaining that sense of power is often easier said than done.

“I have to either devote large amounts of time to preserving my mental state or repress my problems and hope they don’t bubble up. Typically, due to the time restraints of school, I choose the second option,” Anonymous said.

Many students across UT’s campus face a daily battle for their mental health, employing their own tactics for battling their obstacles and gaining a sense of control. Amidst the struggles of college life, it is important that students seek ways to promote their mental health – be it through counseling, medication, or their own, personal ways of gaining power.



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