Not your usual place for a Christmas tree

By LORENZO BURGIO
STAFF WRITER

BRISTOL — The Bristol Hospital Counseling Center is holding a series of educational discussions about mental health and substance recovery to provide knowledge and fight stigmas of related issues.

The Mental Health and Substance Recovery Education Series consists of an educational discussion set for each month. Each discussion is focused on a different related topic.

The center’s staff spoke with patients to decide on the topics, explained Michael Miarecki, licensed clinical social worker at the counseling center.

“The patients talk about their families not understanding, or saying to them ‘It can’t be that bad,’” Miarecki said. “People aren’t very understanding of the issues and the patients are very clear when they say that.”

The focus is to provide a resource for those seeking help and decreasing these stigmas by having an open dialogue with a mental health provider.

“It’s a passion of our hospital and a passion of the counseling center to be providing that education,” said Miarecki, adding that the topics of the educational discussions are all “hot button issues” and the staff at the center is collaborating to run the discussions.

“It’s not therapy. It’s a chance for people who don’t understand to be able to ask questions and have them answered by people who have experience,” Miarecki said.

The series also provides a platform for individuals facing related issues to be introduced to the counseling center.

“We want people to be introduced to this facility,” Miarecki said. “It’s a place that people can feel comfortable and feel safe.”

The upcoming educational series is set for Sept. 5, and is focused on suicide awareness.

“It’s important to talk about what suicide is, be aware that anyone can be experiencing suicidal thoughts at any time and to know what to do in those situations, is what we want to be talking about,” Miarecki said. “Mental health is becoming more prevalent and it’s important to talk about that as a medical issue and not just as a taboo subject.”

Each discussion has a designated topic, however, Miarecki emphasized the fact that any topic or question is always open for discussion.

“Any question is welcome. It doesn’t have to be specific to the day’s topic. It’s an open forum ultimately,” he said. “People are more than welcome to bring any question they want.”

All the educational discussions are set for 6:30 p.m. at Bristol Hospital Counseling Center, located at 420 N. Main Street. No RSVP or appointment is necessary. The service is free and anyone can walk in.

UPCOMING DISCUSSIONS
Sept. 5 - Suicide Awareness
Oct. 3 - Schizophrenia
Nov 7 - Transgender Issues and Resources
Dec. 5 - Anxiety
Jan. 2 - LGBTQ Issues
Feb. 6 - Substance Use and Recovery Resources

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