

What If We Treated Other Illnesses Like We Do Mental Illness?

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What if it was common for people to make jokes about having a left breast removed due to cancer? What if you heard those jokes in church, on social media, by medical professionals, by people you call friends?

What would it feel like to read a status update on Facebook that said, “Thinking of getting a nipple tattoo! LOL!” or “If my hair doesn’t stop thinning, people are going to think I am going through radiation treatments! HA HA!”

All those people (men get it too) who have had breast cancer would feel a sting that something that nearly took their life, or has taken the life of someone they know, or may still take their life, is now a punch line in a joke. All those people would feel like their pain, fear, suffering, loss, was someone else’s entertainment. Without validation for their experience, they would feel like they were on the outside.

What would it feel like if you had to go to the hospital, and rather than receiving get well cards, or phone calls, or texts, everyone avoided you?

Let’s say your appendix ruptured and your inbox contained nothing but the usual advertisements. No one helped your family by sending over meals, and no flowers were delivered to your door.

What would it feel like to come so close to death and there was no one to call and say, “I am so happy you are alive! Thank God, you made it!”

What would it feel like if your cancer or diabetes made you feel shame?

What would it feel like if cancer or heart disease made you feel like a person with a defect?

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What would it feel like if you had to hide your cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease from your employer, your neighbors, your coworkers, and your friends?

What would it feel like if you told people that the way they described your cancer, or diabetes, or heart disease made you uncomfortable, and they told you, that you are “too sensitive” and “too easily offended.”

What would it feel like if the media said that people with cancer are mass murderers?

What if people feared you because you have cancer?

What if people thought you were dangerous because you have heart disease?

What if on Halloween people wore bandages around their chest and said their costume was a mastectomy?

What if rather than rally around you during your worst symptoms, people turned away?

There is no what if, when you have schizophrenia, this is our/my reality. This is our life, and you can choose to laugh it off, or you can join us by seeing mental illness for what it is –an illness like any other. It is tragic, painful and deadly.

Please help us to create a better environment for those of us who have a mental illness. If someone you know has a depressive, psychotic or manic episode, then when they are recovering, call, text, or send chocolates. I don't know too many people who wouldn't welcome a box of chocolates.

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