



Personal, painful memories combined with hope and determination for a better future at Portland City Club's January 22 Friday Forum on "RAW: An Honest Conversation about Mental Health."

"It's the isolation, the loneliness, that kills," said singer Storm Large, recounting the heartbreak of her mother's struggles with mental illness and the isolation and stigma that too often attaches to mental health patients and their families.

As a teenager, she contributed to that isolation "to protect myself," as lack of information about her mother's condition led to fear, resentment and anger during her childhood and teenage years.

Audience members wept with her as she recalled the day her mother was scheduled to move to assisted care. "I walked in on my mother. She was naked, sobbing, with pills everywhere," Large told them, "I said, 'get out.'"

Too many pills, not enough compassionate, post-hospital care and a lack of information and support for family members characterized the treatment of her mom and of moderator and journalist Sheila Hamilton's husband, who committed suicide shortly after his bipolar disorder diagnosis. "He was sent home from the hospital after a suicide attempt with bags of pills, but no follow-up treatment plan," Hamilton said.

Hamilton and Large, who have both written books about their experiences, shared the stage with Chris Farentinos, M.D., vice president of the Unity Center for Behavioral Health. Dr. Farentinos explained how the Unity Center plans to dramatically improve local treatment options for behavioral health patients.

The goal, is "to make mental health okay; just another disease," said Dr. Farentinos. She pointed out that 30 years ago, people would not reveal that they had cancer, because the disease carried such a stigma. Today, it is readily acknowledged, and screenings, early detection and treatments have dramatically improved.

Dr. Farentinos explained how the comprehensive care model for the Unity Center is designed to provide both an emergency center devoted to behavioral health crisis care AND to provide transitions to post-hospital, community-based care through on-site connections to support services. "Peer navigators who have a history of mental health or addiction issues will be a key component," she said, bringing "a message of recovery and hope" and helping patients figure out their next steps.

"It is a myth that mental health patients cannot get better," Dr. Farentinos told the crowd.

"Recovery is possible," said Hamilton, "So many providers now believe that. Find those providers!"

You can help. Legacy Health is raising \$40 million to create the Unity Center, scheduled to open in late 2016. It will be operated through a joint partnership between Legacy Health, Adventist Health, Kaiser Permanente and Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU). You can bring recovery and hope with [a donation to Unity Center](#).

Read more:

[All the Things We Never Knew: Chasing the Chaos of Mental Illness, by Sheila Hamilton, Seal Press \(CA\)](#)

[Crazy Enough: A Memoir, by Storm Large, Free Press](#)

Listen to the program:

Online

<http://www.pdxcityclub.org/live>

Radio

Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB)

KOPB, Portland (91.5 FM)

Fridays, 7:00pm

Statewide broadcast; find your station [here](#).

Cable television

- Channel 30 Portland and East Multnomah County

Fridays, 8:00pm

- Channel 30 Portland

Sundays, 6:00pm

- Channel 11 Portland Metro-Area

Delayed broadcast the following Friday, 12:00pm