



The reciprocal relationship of chronic illness and mental health

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My focus:

- The reciprocal relationship between physical and mental health, using cancer as a specific example of a chronic illness
- The added dimension of CoVID on chronic illness
- Simple, evidence-based strategies that could be leveraged in the workplace.

The Reciprocal Relationship

- People with chronic physical health conditions experience anxiety and mood disorders at **twice the rate** of the general population.
- Conversely, people with serious mental health problems experience increased incidence of physical illness and mortality.




COVID-19 Pandemic: Important information for patients and visitors of CAMH

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Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic

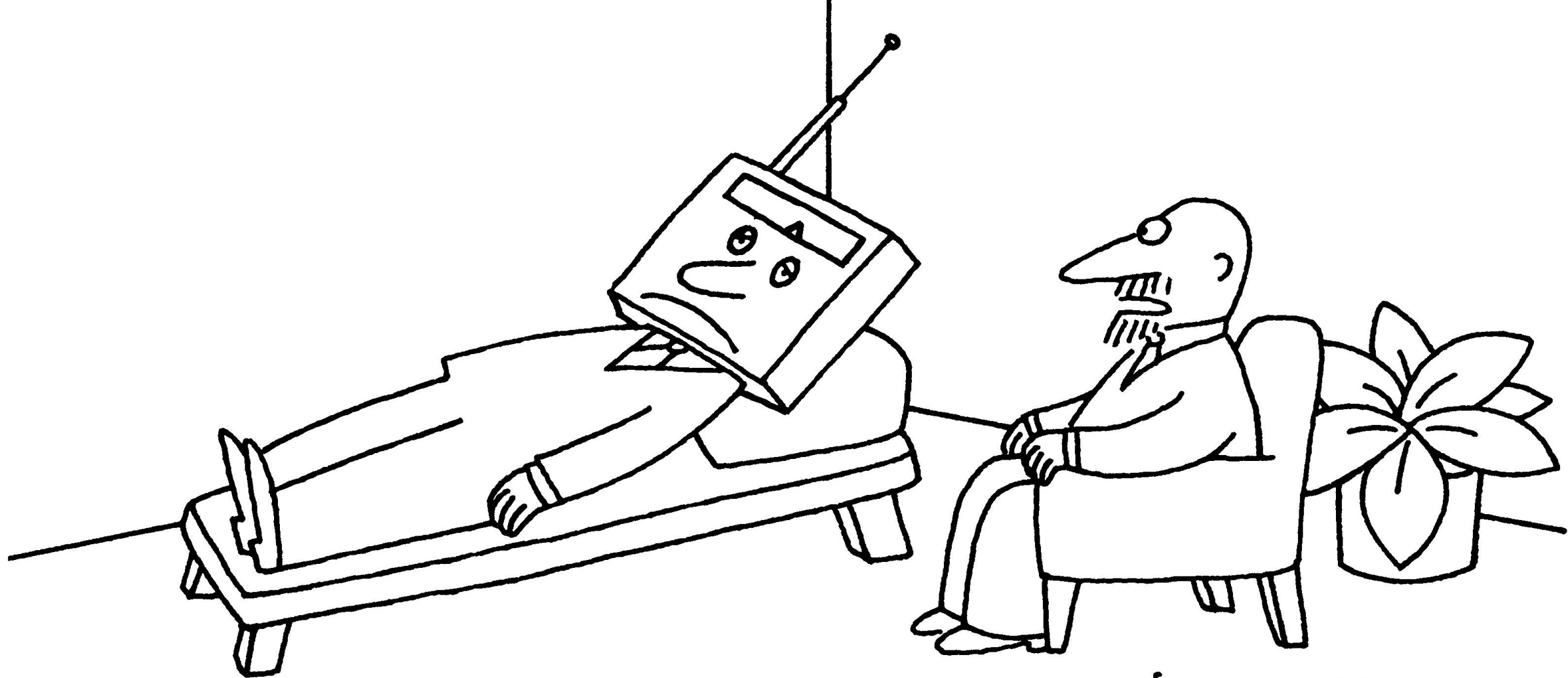
Statistic Canada Surveys (Feb-May 2021)

A greater proportion of Canadian adults screened positive for major depressive disorder in spring 2021 compared with fall 2020 (19% vs. 15%).

Similarly, a higher proportion of Canadian adults screened positive for generalized anxiety disorder (15% in spring 2021 vs. 13% in fall 2020).

In contrast:

12% MDD to 8.7% GAD in general population



Ciorrotti

*“Of course you’re depressed. You’re tuned to a
twenty-four-hour all-news station.”*

Layering on Chronic Health Conditions

Using Cancer as an example

- In 2015, about 2 million Canadians aged 12 and older reported having been diagnosed with cancer at some point.
- While survival statistics vary by cancer type, about 85% of people diagnosed will live 5+ years
- Many are “cured” but continue to live with serious long-term effects, including elevated mental health concerns

After the end of active treatment

Long term effects:

- pain
- physical limitations
- fatigue
- sleep disturbances
- cognitive difficulties, and
- sexual problems
- anxiety, depression, PTSD

Late effects:

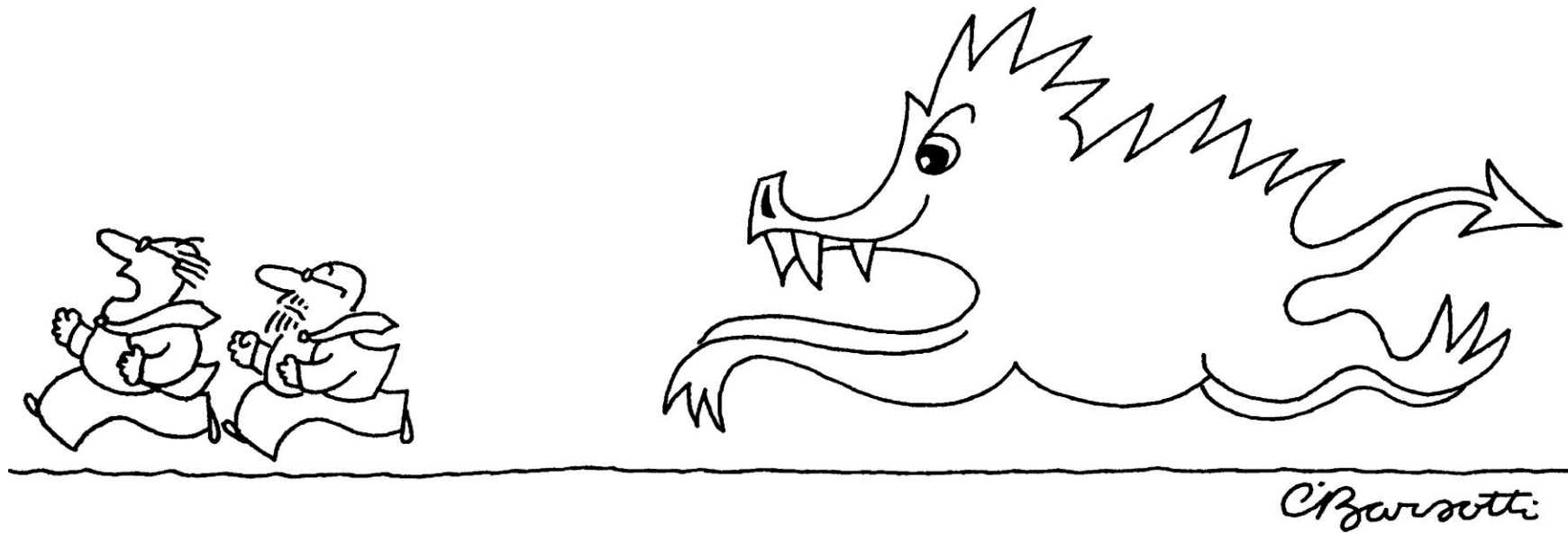
- lymphedema
- hypothyroidism
- cardiac or respiratory problems
- secondary malignancies

Caregivers:

Unrecognized members of the cancer survivorship community

- Caregivers, predominantly women and spouses, report substantial caregiver-related burden, stress and depression
- Caregivers often balance other life responsibilities
- May have their own health issues & neglect aspects of self-care
- Cancer caregiving (compared with caregiving for other conditions) is more intense and episodic
- Cancer caregivers' psychosocial well-being is interdependent with the person with cancer

Aside from professional help . . .



“You’re the therapist—you make it go away.”

Behavioural Strategies

Recent research highlights that the *most* beneficial aspects of cognitive behavioral therapy might be the behavioral aspects

E.g. Studies have found that *sufficient* physical activity is effective for prevention as well as a treatment adjunct for mild to moderate distress (anxiety/depression)

Behavioral Strategies

- But physical activity is not the only activity that we need . . . other kinds of activities are also important.



Behavioral Strategies

Play

Time in natural environments

Relaxation & meditation

Socialization



Play . . .



Laughter

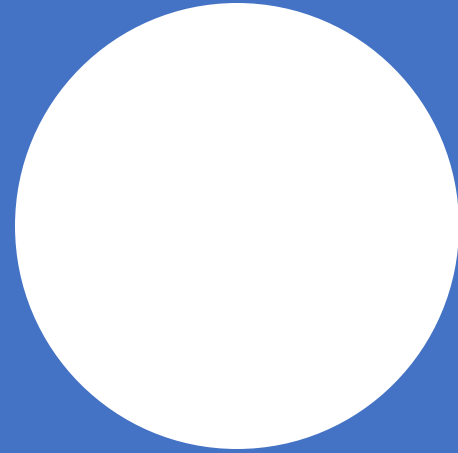
- Endorphins
- Decreases stress hormones
- boosts immune function



A Scientific Investigation Robert Provine (2001)



Photo by [christian buehner](#) on [Unsplash](#)



The Effect of Natural Environments





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Meditation



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What helps?

- Employer sensitivity to the burden
- Accommodations
- Healthy workplace strategies

Employer Sensitivity

- Kindness and compassion
- Managing illness is ongoing, in many cases life long. Don't let support wane or forget about invisible disabilities
- Acknowledge how difficult waxing and waning productivity is *for the employee*

Accommodations

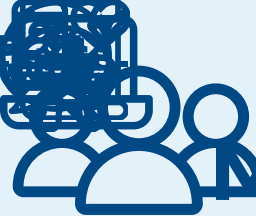
- When accommodations are requested – RESPOND in a timely way
- Ensure that managers can guide the process

Healthy Workplace Strategies

- Create a soothing /rejuvenating space; no work focus zone; “time out” spaces
- Bring natural environments into workspaces
- Encourage music, play, laughter
- Schedule massage/yoga
- Mindfulness breaks



With a bit of creative thinking, meetings with her boss had become the highlight of Joan's day.



Mental Health Program



Access support in 24-48 hours without a referral

Access to therapy as long as it is needed

Connect with outside providers to optimize care

Access to psychiatric assessment

Assistance for both member and their immediate family

24/7 access to tools including educational materials and mobile apps to provide support between therapy sessions





Thank you!