

Prevention in Practice Summit 2023 reflection

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My complex and long story of mental ill-health, in a few sentences, is this: I was unwell through the 1970s, 80s, 90s and had a complete emotional breakdown before I had any awareness of what I was going through. I went to seven GPs without a diagnosis. I was mocked.

We clearly had to start at an awareness campaign for mental ill-health. And I've witnessed how far we've come since the 1990s.

But, as highlighted in the Prevention in Practice Summit, the reality that mental ill-health numbers aren't going down despite all this work is something we all need to reflect on.

It was fascinating to hear keynote speakers talk about the need to understand the complexities and different roles, and functions at play; the need for collaboration and partnerships; the fight against power, money and politics.

As someone who doesn't (and never has) worked in the mental health sector but the business world as a marketing consultant, what I was left contemplating was how I fit into this partnership.

Whilst I read awareness and speeches of lived experience often being downplayed within the sector, I know the reality of how important this work still is for the general public in understanding the reality of living with mental ill-health.

Maybe it's that the academia and clinical worlds are a few steps ahead of consumers, which they (you) absolutely should be. But we need to consider who is building the bridge of understanding between your insights and the public's.

And then we get to psychosocial hazards in workplaces that are meant to help, yet, as shared at the summit, mostly focus on supporting workers rather than preventative strategies.

What I didn't hear, though, is an understanding of how rife stigma remains. It absolutely still exists and it's crippling to many of us.

I'd like to think psychosocial hazards' legislation and the possibility of litigation will help address this issue, but I also know at a small business level the law is against an employee.

Reality is, I need to romanticise my story and reality while running a marketing business, otherwise I will lose work.

Whilst people love the recovery stories of courage, hope and resilience, many also have my health background top-of-mind and that this may interrupt delivery; that this is not viable for their business.

I have been told this. Recently.

And I have countless stories as an employee where my openness has been thrown back at me regardless of whether it was a factor or not.

Mental ill-health is an easy scapegoat for poor workplace practices. Despite the growth of 'diversity and inclusion' and 'wellbeing' departments, too many workplaces want to work with well people who will fit into how they've always conducted business. Re-engineering their systems takes too much work and money.

They do not see the return on investment (ROI).

We need to educate the business world that prevention strategies – and I have a bunch that would have helped me – are not complicated and would have huge ROI in not only financial terms but personnel.

There was a slide that talked about the need to hear new voices. But there was nothing about how the sector should promote their opportunities. Nor the transparency and disclosure of appointments.

I feel lucky to have been given a seat at the Everymind table after many knockbacks from other organisations.

Even when you find the doors, it's incredibly difficult to open them and be invited in.

The frustration lays because I know I am also an opportunity for you. An opportunity to tell the stories and help build bridges of understanding from a research and clinical perspective to those who do not understand, nor want to understand, that world.

They do understand human stories that are communicated in simple language. And this usually translates into care.

As highlighted, when the general public care, those in power will start to care because their success relies on us.

At least that's a start of the prevention puzzle.