

Improving Mental Health

Four Secrets in Plain Sight

Lloyd I. Sederer, M.D.

Foreword by Patrick Kennedy

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In *Improving Mental Health: Four Secrets in Plain Sight*, Dr. Lloyd Sederer draws upon four decades of diverse clinical practice, mental health research and public health experience to create a memorable volume that is as elegant as it is instructive. The book aims to help clinicians improve the lives of their patients—and patients to improve their own lives—by identifying these secrets and taking action in ways that can work immediately, closing the science-to-practice gap. In addition to mental health and primary care clinicians, patients and their families will find the book's many stories, clinical examples and cultural references fascinating and sustaining.



The book's four foundational truths, all hiding in plain sight and all eminently actionable, are:

- **Behavior serves a purpose.** The search for meaning and the identification and communication value of a behavior are too often overlooked aspects of mental health care and a lost opportunity with and for patients and their families.
- **The power of attachment.** The force of attachment as a human need and drive must be harnessed if we are to change painful and problem behaviors. Relationships are the royal road to remedying human suffering—both individual and collective.
- **As a rule, less is more.** Mental health treatments, both medical and psychosocial, have often been aggressive, from high doses of drugs to intensive sessions and psychic confrontation in individual and group psychotherapy. Unfortunately, these high-risk efforts infrequently provide help and often have unwanted and problematic effects. *Primum non nocere—first, do no harm—is the first law of medicine.*
- **Chronic stress is the enemy.** From adverse childhood experiences to posttraumatic stress, chronic stress can be an underlying factor in the development of many mental and physical disorders. However, chronic stress can be understood and contained, thereby reducing its damage.

Dr. Sederer synthesizes the knowledge gained through his considerable experience as a psychiatrist with insights gleaned from history, research and literature to address the four truths in a systematic, yet lively, manner. The result is a book of rare grace. *Improving Mental Health: Four Secrets in Plain Sight* will be a touchstone for the clinician and general reader alike.

Lloyd I. Sederer, M.D., is Chief Medical Officer of the New York State Office of Mental Health, the nation's largest state mental health system. He is adjunct professor of epidemiology at the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. Previously, Dr. Sederer served as the Executive Deputy Commissioner for Mental Hygiene Services in New York City. He also has been Medical Director and Executive Vice President of McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts, a Harvard-teaching hospital, and Director of the Division of Clinical Services for the American Psychiatric Association.

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