

## **Beware: The Pitfalls and Gaps of Typical Psychiatric Treatments for the Ultra-Wealthy**

As an advisor to the very wealthy, you may encounter clients or family members of clients with psychiatric issues. They may look to you for answers on how to get care.

The irony is that people with the means to purchase the best mental health treatment available typically do *not* get the most effective, evidence-based care. This puts the ultra-wealthy at much greater risk of being derailed from life by their psychiatric disorders, unable to continue moving forward in a satisfying and productive way, a derailment that can be permanent.

This paradox reflects the fact that within the universe of treatments, there are more risks to those you are trying to help than you might think.

While many treatments can help individuals with specific psychiatric symptoms, institutional settings, that is, hospitals or restrictive residential programs that segregate a person from the community, often damage people through what I call *psychosocial trauma* – the loss of a social role; the stigma associated with their new identity of “mental patient;” the feeling of having failed at the normal human work of creating a life outside a hospital; and increasingly decreased hope for the future.

The very affluent disproportionately suffer psychosocial trauma since they typically end up hospitalized for psychiatric episodes. There are several reasons for this high incidence of hospitalization: Community-based mental health services are usually provided based on financial need, which normally disqualifies the ultra-wealthy from the continuum of care these agencies offer. Then too, during a mental health crisis or once back home from a hospitalization, the wealthy tend to exhibit the conditioned response of choosing treatment with a renowned psychiatrist, often the top name in the field. This cultural habit drives the choice to place their mental health care in the hands of a single specialist who provides them with medication and/or therapy.

While one-on-one therapy and/or medication are valuable, they are not sufficient to help a person with a serious psychiatric condition create a meaningful life for themselves. By relying on one specialist, a high-wealth person is more likely to need a hospital the first time around, and more likely to repeatedly rotate through hospital settings.

Another route taken by the super-affluent when dealing with serious mental health issues or following a psychiatric hospitalization, is to attend a high-profile program frequented by a celebrity clientele. But attractive as this option may appear on the surface, with its lavish amenities and high status, it does not offer your client the best care, as these programs typically emphasize the outward trapping of treatment rather than providing a comprehensive program based on an evidence-based approach.

So what does work?

There is mounting evidence that when provided well, *a holistic continuum of mental health treatment services provided to a person right in the community is enough to support them, without the need for a hospital.* A community-based treatment program that coordinates a wide variety of services not only helps people recover from the psychiatric problem, but is the paramount approach for helping them function effectively and recover a place for themselves in the world.

The good news for the very affluent is that appropriate private programs exist that offer them this type of effective community-based treatment approach. These programs can help both before a crisis and after a person leaves an institutional setting. Importantly, they can avert or minimize time spent in psychiatric hospitals.

Psychosocial damage does not have to happen. You are in an excellent position to help your clients avoid the repetitive cycle of care and the psychosocial damage each new institutionalization heaps upon the existing psychiatric problem.

Steering your clients to forms of mental health treatment that do not inflict additional harm can make the difference between a lifetime of impairment and the real recovery of a life and a future.

My company, Prakash Ellenhorn LLC, and Ed Levin, LCSW, of Ed Levin Mental Health Consulting, are happy to guide you in helping affluent families find these best-practice treatment alternatives.

***Ross Ellenhorn, LICSW, PhD** combines his expertise as a psychotherapist, social worker and sociologist to view treatment for mental illness through a unique psychosocial lens. He sees the disabling impact of being labeled a mental patient and separated from society through hospitalizations, as often the prime cause of the “dysfunction” in people with mental health disorders. His treatment approach, successfully practiced at the Prakash Ellenhorn program he co-founded and directs, delivers integrated multidisciplinary team services to most clients in their own apartments in the community, helping them find the psychological and social resources for reengaging in life. Dr. Ellenhorn’s book, Parasuicidality and Paradox: Breaking Through the Medical Model, which describes models for keeping people out of psychiatric hospitals, was published by Springer Publishing in 2007.*  
[www.prakashellenhorn.com](http://www.prakashellenhorn.com)

***For inquiries about the Prakash Ellenhorn treatment program or other treatment resources, contact Ed Levin of Levin Mental Health Consulting, at <mailto:ed.levin@levinmentalhealthconsulting.com>.***