Campus Offers Mental Health Services for Students

By David Wilson, chancellor
University of Wisconsin Colleges
University of Wisconsin Extension

Do you know anyone who has problems with binge drinking or anorexia?

Have your grades ever suffered because you were anxious or depressed?

Have you ever felt like hurting yourself or someone else?

If the answer was yes, you are not alone. Nearly half of students report having some mental health issues during their college careers.

That’s why the Board of Regents will consider a resolution at their December meeting to require the UW Colleges to offer mental health services.

Starting in the 2008-09 academic year, students have had access to an online health website, Smart + Healthy, which includes a useful self-assessment tool for common health risks. All campuses now offer on-campus counselors. Depending on the size of the campus, counselors are available between six and 20 hours per week. Students are entitled to four free face-to-face counseling sessions. After that, they are referred to community resources. Check your campus website for information, or contact your Student Services office.

These services are funded by segregated student fees and that has naturally led to questions by some students about who uses these services and who benefits. In fact, mental health problems are distressingly common on campus.

Nationally, one student out of every eight uses campus mental health services, according to a 2007 survey by the Anxiety Disorders Association of America. The problems can be serious.

A 2006 National College Health Assessment found:

- More than nine percent of students have seriously considered suicide.
- Nearly 44 percent said they've been so depressed it was difficult to function.
- More than 13 percent reported experiencing an anxiety disorder.
- Thirteen percent had an emotionally abusive relationship in the past school year.
Other studies have found that anxiety or binge drinking can result in lower grades.

On the UW Colleges campuses, the most commonly reported mental health issues are:

1. Anxiety and depression
2. Relationship issues
3. Alcohol and other drug abuse

At all UW Colleges, student mental health services are funded from segregated fees paid by students at a rate determined by the student government on each campus. By far the largest fee allocations on all campuses are for athletics and student activities.

Mental health counseling benefits both the individuals who receive the counseling and the whole campus community. Even if you personally never need counseling, a friend, room-mate or another classmate might. Maintaining a happy, productive campus where everyone has the opportunity to succeed is well worth the small expense.