

Transcript Details

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Global Madness: How Mental Illness Is Perceived Around the World

Dr. Caudle:

With an estimated 1 in 5 Americans experiencing a mental health disorder in a given year, chances are that we all know someone who is affected by it, and when an illness like this hits closer to home for us, it can be hard to look at it on a global scale. But what if you could get a bird's-eye view of how mental illness is perceived across the entire world? Would it change the way you think about it or even your approach to treating it?

Welcome to Clinician's Roundtable on ReachMD. I'm your host, Dr. Jennifer Caudle, and joining me today is Dr. Fred Moss, a psychiatrist who's been working on creating a docuseries about how mental illness is perceived around the world.

Dr. Moss, thank you so much for joining us today.

Dr. Moss:

It's great to be here.

Dr. Caudle:

Well, we're very excited that you're here. So let's just dive right in because I'm actually really excited to learn more about your docuseries. Can you tell us what led to you wanting to explore this on a global scale, and what are you hoping to achieve?

Dr. Moss:

I have spent much of the last several years of my nearly 40-year career in mental health looking deeply at what mental illness really is and the best ways to address mental pain, anguish, misery, discomfort and the like. Within psychiatry, I've questioned what we really know about mental illness and the message we use now to address it looking at several different modalities that are presently utilized in our country, and I've really wondered if it is the best treatment that we use or if there might be something to learn from the way other cultures treat similar presentations. This curiosity as well as my deep interest in travel and discovery naturally led to the creation of this Global Madness project. And to tell you the truth, Jennifer, when this came to me, it hit me like a ton of bricks, like, "Oh wow, now I know why I was even put here on the planet," you know, like my life work became really evident to me, and I'm really grateful for having that experience. I feel really fortunate about that.

Dr. Caudle:

Based on your research and your discussions to this point, what are you prepared to discover during your upcoming world journey, and what are some of the places that you're planning to visit? What might we expect to see in the film?

Dr. Moss:

In my practice at this point, back home I'm focusing on essentially altering the narrative of mental illness from the roots up. As Dr. Fred I have been making my greatest impact with my patients by really looking at their diagnoses head-on and reviewing whether the treatment might be due for a deep shift in its orientation. For instance, I've been injecting creativity as a treatment plan with great success for alleviating emotional pain, and overall, my patients have been responding remarkably well to the new protocols and inquiries, and it's been really rewarding from both a personal and professional standpoint.

So now we're going around the world to see how mental illness is dealt with in various culturally specific areas of the planet. Some of the places we're planning to go to include Israel, Nigeria, Holland, Finland, China, and even a spot in Vermont, and these are places where really spectacular outcomes are being reported using alternative ways of managing mental distress. My website is welcometohumanity.net, and "welcome to humanity" is also my signature social media hashtag, so some version of this is what I continually expect to run across, probably every day along the way at the project. For sure what is seen as ill in one context is seen as

gifted in another, and the ways of speaking about symptoms, from sadness to anxiety, from confusion to altered states of reality, can differ wildly between different cultures. It will be so interesting to explore these differences and the similarities with my film team of documentarians and to ask difficult questions and hear surprising answers as we uncover whatever we do in the places that we visit. I mean, really, maybe I could become the Anthony Bourdain of mental health. Maybe we might even do the project in memory of him.

Dr. Caudle:

Very interesting indeed. And you've talked a little bit about what you hope for and sort of what your plans are, and I would love if you could expound a little bit more about the vision you have about how this project might impact people who are either affected by mental illness directly or the clinicians who treat these conditions on a regular basis. What's the basic intention that you have in this venture?

Dr. Moss:

Okay, that's a great question. I am really hoping to create a sense of hope and community among those who are presently diagnosed with mental illness and receiving some sort of treatment which may or may not be optimal for them. New ideas about how to treat and embrace symptoms that may otherwise have led to a sense of being diseased or less than or sick or afflicted could rise as a result. Clinicians and caretakers might also find new, unimagined ways of seeing their patients or loved ones and be able to find either compassion or empathy for that experience or their experience. Maybe they might find that there is a thin line between their own experience of living and of reality and the experience of the patients that they are treating as abnormal. I mean the difference between normal and abnormal may actually be less than what we typically think, and that alone could lead to significant breakthroughs in how we relate with each other.

Dr. Caudle:

So, for those of you who are just tuning in, this is ReachMD, and I'm your host, Dr. Jennifer Caudle. Today I'm speaking with Dr. Fred Moss about his upcoming docuseries called Global Madness, which focuses on how mental illness is perceived worldwide.

So, Dr. Moss, as you now prepare to begin this journey into the world of mental illness globally, what are your ideas about some of the perceptions of mental illness that are now ready to be transformed? And are you expecting to learn something universal about mental illness as you explore the different cultures?

Dr. Moss:

Well, thanks for asking such a great question. And as I just referred to, maybe what we're going to find is the difference between being mentally ill and mentally healthy is not so discreet and obvious. Maybe we're all closer to each other than we otherwise imagined, and maybe the treatments that we're using now might not be the very best, most effective treatments available. You know, medications certainly bring a sense of good to many people, but obviously, they have their very large drawbacks and problems. Maybe the diagnoses and medications that we have been using in the last few decades here in the United States aren't leading to the best possible outcomes. So, by really looking at how these so-called symptoms are dealt with in various areas of the world and seeing some extraordinary and probably unexpected results, maybe we will be able to draw from that and find treatments and healing pathways that could now be utilized to profoundly shift the downward pathway that some of our more unfortunate patients presently find themselves on. Wouldn't that be just great?

Dr. Caudle:

Well, you know, this has been so interesting, and your perspectives have been really interesting as well, as well as this project. Before we wrap up, I'd like to ask you if there's anything we haven't covered yet that you'd like to share with our listeners.

Dr. Moss:

Yes, actually there is, Jennifer, and thanks for asking. In my experience and in my practice, it seems that there are a couple factors that are actually prerequisite for healing to occur. This is true in more than the mental health realm and may include all realms of medicine and illness. What I'm proposing here is that communication in the form of connection with each other through self-expression and deep listening is a primary prerequisite component of healing, and without it, no healing is really possible. I am also suggesting that the promotion of creativity through arts, music, dancing and the like, as well as writing and even cleaning and gardening, are so useful in creating a space for healing for conditions of all types.

And finally, when all else fails, I suggest helping anybody do anything. I have found that by being of service, at least during the time of doing so, it seems that the aches and pains that we are having physically and emotionally just disappear. It's a wonderful find and seems to be sort of the ace in the hole to use when it seems like nothing else is helping. I expect this is actually a universal phenomenon, and we'll be looking for this as we go around the world for the Global Madness project.

And if any of my listeners here would like to become involved in this project or just follow me as it develops, I invite to you stop by at welcometohumanity.net or to follow me on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or Instagram. During this conversation about mental illness, one

day at a time, has really given my professional identity a useful purpose, and I'm always looking at handling questions and meeting people on a similar or complementary pathway to continue this discussion forward.

Finally, Jennifer, thank you so much for having me again on ReachMD and for this really engaging inquiry. It's been a real pleasure, and I'm really grateful for the opportunity.

Dr. Caudle:

Well, we certainly are as well. This has truly been a fascinating look into how mental health is seen and treated across the world. And I would like to also thank you, Dr. Moss, for sharing your journey with us and also sharing with us about the development of your docuseries called Global Madness. Dr. Moss, it was wonderful having you on the program. Thank you for joining us.

Dr. Moss:

Thanks for having me.

Dr. Caudle:

I'm Dr. Jennifer Caudle, and you've been listening to Clinician's Roundtable on ReachMD. To access this episode and others in the series, please visit us at ReachMD.com/cliniciansroundtable where you can Be Part of the Knowledge.