Language matters in compassionate care, especially in behavioral health care, and that doesn’t mean just what you say in front of a patient. What you say behind closed doors with coworkers can be the seed for stigma and perpetuate discrimination against a person based on a physical or mental disorder.

Using people-first language means speaking in a way that primarily acknowledges the person, rather than the illness or disability. In other words, individuals with mental illness and disabilities are first and foremost ... people!

“TRY SAYING THIS...”
► People with a mental illness...
► He has schizophrenia.
► They are a person with addiction.
► She has borderline personality disorder.
► He has an intellectual disability.
► A person suffering from depression...
► She is a person who uses a wheelchair.

[ THESE WORDS INDICATE WHAT A PERSON HAS, NOT WHAT A PERSON IS ]

“INSTEAD OF THIS”
► The mentally ill...
► He’s schizophrenic.
► They’re an addict.
► She’s borderline.
► He is retarded.
► A depressed person...
► She’s wheelchair bound.

[ THESE WORDS LIMIT AN INDIVIDUAL’S FULL POTENTIAL ]