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Dr. Jamila Codrington, right, clinical supervisor and therapist at Astor Services for Children and Families in the Bronx, answers a question during the Mental Health Summit at the Sheen Center for Thought and Culture in Manhattan Feb. 13. With her from left are Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, moderator; Dr. Derek Suite, M.D., MS, of Full Circle Health in the Bronx, and Dr. David L. Ginsberg, M.D., of NYU Langone Medical Center in Manhattan.

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Mental Health Summit Joins Faith Communities, Health Professionals

By DAN PIETRAFESA

New York City's First Lady Chirlane McCray delivered the keynote address for what she, mental health professionals and faith community members hope will become a continuing collaboration.

"This is an important topic for everyone to talk about, but especially for people like the leadership in this audience," Ms. McCray, the wife of Mayor Bill de Blasio, told the media

following her speech at a Mental Health Summit for New York City's faith leaders hosted by the New York City Commission of Religious Leaders at the Sheen Center for Thought and Culture in Lower Manhattan Feb. 13.

"People turn to (their spiritual leaders) so often and they need to be as up on this subject as possible," she said. "I'm happy to be able to share some resources with them and keep the conversation going."

The executive committee of the New York City Commission of Religious Leaders—Cardinal Dolan, Rabbi Joseph Patasnik, Rev. Dr. A.R. Bernard Sr. and Rev. Jimmy Lim—organized the event. Rabbi Potasnik was the moderator of a panel discussion, and Dr. Bernard delivered the closing prayer.

Cardinal Dolan opened the summit with a welcome and prayer.

"Dear God and Father of us all, you have a special love and care for those who struggle, search and suffer," the cardinal prayed. "You heal the body, yes, but you heal as well the heart, the soul and the mind. We ask that we might be agents of your soothing grace and mercy."

Ms. McCray addressed the crowd, comprised of members of many faiths, including clergy from the archdiocese. She shared five tips to help the collaboration grow: encourage congregants to sign up for a mental health, first-aid class; participate in the second Weekend of Faith scheduled in May; spread the word of NYC Well, which offers free, confidential counseling 24 hours a day, 365 days a year; join Virtual Learning Center, which launches in March with a website of resources on mental health issues, and remember to take care of yourself.

Ms. McCray stressed the importance of speaking with "a professional who can make a proper diagnosis and give them a treatment that works for them whether it's long-term counseling, medication or a combination of both. It takes a professional to make that diagnosis, but a faith leader can do so much in helping a person feel comfortable talking about what's plaguing them, what's making them uncomfortable and helping them get to the right type of care."

A panel discussion followed with Dr. Jamila Codrington, clinical supervisor and therapist at Astor Services for Children and Families in the Bronx; Dr. David L. Ginsberg, M.D., chief of psychiatry services at NYU Langone Medical Center in Manhattan; and Dr. Derek H. Suite, M.D., MS, founder of Full Circle Health in the Bronx, which provides confidential mental performance services to performers and professional athletes, including the New York Knicks.

"Most people will go to someone they trust and know first before going to a mental health professional," Dr. Ginsberg said. "We want to give the clergy the best possible information available, so that they can provide accurate information and get the person to the next step of services that's really going to be useful to complement the counseling the clergy are doing."

Auxiliary Bishop John J. O'Hara, episcopal vicar for South, East and West Manhattan and Staten Island, delivered some words of inspiration when he stood up from his seat in the crowd to answer a question from an adult Catholic who has battled depression since childhood. He shared one of his favorite Scripture passages of a woman battling a hemorrhage for 12 years, who was healed by touching Jesus' garment.

"What we heard here is extraordinary, but I think the faith community has something we can give. The Lord has put something into our hands and our job is to take all of this, connect it with our faith experience and then provide that is going to lift you up," Bishop O'Hara said.

"Raise your hand, touch the garment, ask for that healing and he will lift you up."

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