



Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health

Hospital Sees Huge Increase in Self-Injury Patients, Ages Treated Getting Younger

The number of 12- and 13-year-olds treated for self-injury at Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health has increased nearly 6-fold since 2008.

Hoffman Estates, IL (October 7, 2014) – Up to 17% of young adults have self-injured at least once in their lifetime.¹ With hospital census increasing rapidly in recent years, the experts at Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health have published the new book, *“Self-Injury: Simple Answers to Complex Questions,”* in an effort to better inform both mental health professionals as well as the general public. As the **seventh largest behavioral health provider in the nation**, Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health has seen a 114% increase in self-injury inpatients treated, and a 147% jump in self-injury outpatients treated since 2008. Furthermore, the average age of patients treated for self-injury has declined from 20.6 in 2008 to 16.5 in 2014.²

“Self-Injury: Simple Answers to Complex Questions,” was jointly authored by clinical experts from Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health Hospital’s Center for Self-Injury Recovery. The book is the result of a three-year collaboration among Alexian Brothers clinicians who work with and study patients who self-injure. It highlights ever growing trends in self-injury, and serves as an answer guide for understanding, assessing, and treating self-injury.

Self-Injury involves intentional damage to body tissue without intending to commit suicide, and is largely used by people to manage distressing emotions and thoughts. In their work, Alexian Brothers’ experts found that there are often a variety of reasons for self-injury, many of which can be difficult to understand. Families and therapists alike often struggle with how to intervene with these complex behaviors. For many teens, school increases risk for experiencing distressing emotions and thoughts. For teens at risk for self-injury, the social and academic stressors of school may become difficult to manage without resorting to self-injury, especially when they haven’t learned alternative strategies for regulating themselves. It is common to hear patients say, *‘I hurt myself to stay alive’* when self-injury is used to prevent or cope with suicidal thoughts, feelings or behaviors.

Also alarming is the awareness that self-injury can be contagious. This risky behavior can spread from one person to another in a contagious-like manner. “Rather than spreading biologically through coughing or sneezing, self-injury is spread socially,” said Jason Washburn, Ph.D., the book’s editor and Director of the Center for Evidence-Based Practice at Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health. “Numerous websites and social media outlets often directly or indirectly contribute to the challenging and complex phenomenon of self-injury’s E-contagion,” he said.

Warning Signs and what to look for:

- Numerous unexplained wounds or scars
- Discomfort talking about how a wound occurred, or outright refusal to share what happened
- Consistently covering up specific parts of the body, especially when out of context (e.g., long sleeves in hot weather, refusing to wear a bathing suit or change in front of others, refusing a physical exam from a medical professional, etc.)

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“Self-Injury: Simple Answers to Complex Questions,” is available on Amazon.com. Learn more at abbhh.org/SelfInjuryBook.

About Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health Hospital’s Center for Self-Injury Recovery Services

Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health Hospital’s Center for Self-Injury began in January 2002, and has treated thousands of adolescents and adults who engage in this behavior. In 2006, Alexian Brothers became the first hospital in the nation to be disease-specific certified in self-injury treatment by the Joint Commission.

About Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health Hospital

The seventh largest behavioral health provider in the nation, Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health Hospital (ABBHH) offers comprehensive behavioral health services from prevention and early intervention to treatment and aftercare. Located northwest of Chicago, ABBHH offers both inpatient and outpatient services with a mission to help individuals of all ages learn practical ways to manage mental health and substance abuse problems.

Notably, ABBHH was the **first hospital in the nation** to have been awarded Disease-Specific Care (DSC) Certification in four separate psychiatric specialties: Depression, Chemical Dependency, Eating Disorders, and Self Injury. The designation earned ABBHH the Gold Seal of Approval™ for healthcare quality from the Joint Commission. The Joint Commission's DSC Certification recognizes hospitals that demonstrate excellence in disease management, including the effective use of established clinical practice guidelines to optimize care.

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Sources:

1. Whitlock J, Eckenrode J, Silverman D. Self-injurious behaviors in a college population. *Pediatrics*. 2006;117:1939–1948. doi: 10.1542/peds.2005-2543
2. Washburn, J. (2014). Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health Hospital, Center for Self-Injury Recovery, census 2008-2014. Unpublished raw data.