

Remarks from Carol Goar Upon Receiving the
Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Media Award

Thank you very much for your generous introduction, Ron, and please allow me to thank everyone at the Ontario division of the Canadian Mental Health Association for honouring me with this important and meaningful award.

I consider it one of the great privileges – and responsibilities – of journalism to give a voice to people who are misunderstood, silenced, stigmatized and pushed to the margins of society. Sadly, too many Canadians with mental health challenges fall into the group.

They have every reason not to trust members of the media. We have enormous power to hurt and humiliate vulnerable individuals, sometimes by reinforcing unfair stereotypes, sometimes by an insensitive turn of phrase, sometimes by failing to respect their privacy and dignity.

So I would like to thank every caregiver in the room who has offered me access to a loved one living with living mental illness. I'd like to thank every mental health worker and advocate who has helped me avoid asking ignorant questions or making wrong-headed assumptions. I'd like to thank every person in the mental health community who helped me navigate the system, break down the barriers that impede communication and get the facts right. I'd like to thank every mental health volunteer who has shown me how much of a difference one person can make.

Most of all, I'd like to thank the people living with mental illness who have taken the enormous risk of opening up to me. Without your stories to tell, I couldn't open readers' eyes and help them see the smart, funny, brave, determined people behind society's labels. I give you my word that I will never abuse your trust or exploit your vulnerability.

I'm immensely proud that you've chosen me for your 2013 Ontario Media Award. I pledge to do everything in my power to earn it every time I write a column about mental health.