

The Key Update

The free monthly e-newsletter of the National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse

Volume 1 No. 11 April 2005

<http://www.mhselfhelp.org>

The Key Update Volume 1 No. 11 – April 25, 2005

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS. . .

National Remeron/Mirtazapine Settlement Pending

The Attorneys General of all 50 states and commonwealths, and of the U.S. territories, along with private class counsel, have settled a lawsuit involving the prescription drugs Remeron and generic mirtazapine. If you purchased the drug Remeron or generic mirtazapine from June 15, 2001, through January 25, 2005, you may be entitled to a settlement. To view the settlement link, visit <<http://www.remeronsettlement.com>> or contact <dmccomb@completeclaimssolutions.com>.

Copeland Center Presents Northeast WRAP Conference

The Northeast WRAP conference will be held July 19-21, 2005, at UMASS Conference Center in Amherst, Massachusetts. For registration information see

<<http://www.copelandcenter.com/conference.html>>

**Find out more about upcoming conferences of interest to consumers at

<<http://www.mhselfhelp.org/conferences.html>> **

MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT AND SERVICES...

Use of Drugs to Treat Mental Illness Soars

A new study released in Health Affairs indicates that spending on psychiatric medications is growing much faster than spending on any other medications. According to an analysis of federal health statistics, prescription drug spending grew an average of 17.1 percent per year between 1991 and 2001. Over the same 10-year period, spending on all mental health services increased 73 percent, although spending on hospitalization for mental illness increased by only 1 percent.

Part of the reason for this new trend is that some of the new psychiatric drugs have fewer side effects than older drugs had. The trend also stems from an increased acceptance of the use of psychiatric medications and a decrease in the stigma attached to seeking treatment. Additionally, psychiatric pharmaceuticals such as anti-depressants are much more likely to be prescribed by doctors in general practice today than in the past, and some managed care companies are allocating more resources for outpatient care.

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Source: <<http://www.sacbee.com/content/news/medical/v-print/story/12640278p-13494000c.html>>

NJ Task Force Recommends Recovery-Focused Overhaul of Mental Health System

A mental health task force report recommending an overhaul of New Jersey's mental health system was released by acting New Jersey Governor Richard J. Codey on March 31. The proposed changes are meant to shift the system's focus from maintenance and medication to long-term recovery and wellness. The changes would include establishing additional community mental health screening centers, improving access to and quality of care, and creating postpartum depression screening programs. However, one recommendation of the task force involves involuntary outpatient commitment, which is generally opposed by the mental health advocacy community nationwide.

To fund these changes, Codey, whose wife has spoken publicly about her struggle with severe postpartum depression, has proposed a state budget that would add some \$40 million to the current \$612 million currently allocated to mental health services.

Sources: "Codey task force urges sweeping changes in mental health system," Associated Press, 3/31/05

Task Force Report: <<http://www.nj.gov/mentalhealth/finalreport.html>>

SELF-ADVOCACY AND SELF-CARE RESOURCES...

Meditation Useful in Psychotherapy and Recovery

Meditation practices usually associated with Eastern religions such as Buddhism have been increasingly used as part of, or in combination with, psychotherapy to help individuals recover from mental illness. According to the Harvard Mental Health Letter, more and more therapeutic approaches employ meditation or "mindfulness" to foster self-understanding, augment personal well-being, and help diminish preoccupation with one's own suffering.

Meditation can readily be practiced on your own or with a group as part of a personal mental health recovery program. To learn more, contact a local yoga, Buddhist or meditation center or try the following websites:

<<http://www.learn-to-meditate.com/index.html>>

<<http://www.learningmeditation.com/>>

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Source: <<http://releases.usnewswire.com/GetRelease.asp?id=46115>>

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION. . .

Amish Community Builds Mental Health Home

Long known for rejecting modern technology, the Amish community in Pennsylvania is creating housing on the grounds of a private psychiatric center that will allow Amish consumers to live among their own people while receiving outpatient clinical treatment. The Amish community has contributed all the materials and labor for construction of the residence, known as Green Pastures, which will house up to 15 adults within walking distance of the main facility. While the home will have running water and electricity, it will be culturally appropriate, and will not have television sets or other modern amenities.

Sources: <<http://www.lancasteronline.com/pages/news/local/6/13401>> and
<<http://www.latimes.com/features/health/men/wire/sns-ap-amish-mental-health,1,2693191.story?coll=sns-ap-healthmen-headlines&ctrack=2&cset=true>>

HUMAN RIGHTS...

New York Doctors Now Screening for Depression

In 2003, the report of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, "Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America," recommended that mental health screening be expanded. However, the issue of screening has created a great deal of controversy, with opponents concerned that it will lead to "overdiagnosis, unnecessary treatment and lifelong stigmatization," particularly with regard to children. Those in favor of screening argue that millions of people with serious mental disorders never get help, and that heightened vigilance could allow doctors to head off mental health problems that might worsen with time. Despite this debate, general practitioners and other doctors in New York City have begun using a questionnaire to screen patients for depression. For more information, go to:

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/13/health/13depress.html?>>

Colleges Target Stigma and Mental Illness on Campus

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In spite of the conventional wisdom that college is a carefree time for learning and fun, mental health problems among college-age students are prevalent. College-age adults are especially vulnerable to mental illness, in part because many such problems first emerge in the late teens or early 20s. The high rate of suicide, which accounts for approximately 1,100 student lives per year and is the second leading cause of death among college students, is creating public awareness as to the seriousness of mental illness on college campuses.

According to a 2004 survey of 47,202 students by the American College Health Association, more than 40 percent of U.S. students become so depressed during college years that they have difficulty with daily functioning, while 15 percent suffer clinical depression. The study also found that 1 in 10 students had seriously considered suicide.

In response to the growing crisis, colleges across the country have begun campaigns to educate students about mental illness and treatment and the stigma that often accompanies them. Harvard University faculty members openly discuss mental health concerns and offer help in recognizing potential signs of mental distress as part of the orientation for parents of incoming students. *Active Minds on Campus*, created by Alison Malmon after her brother killed himself at Columbia University, works to create chapters in colleges across the country. These student-run chapters provide information about mental illness, encouraging students to seek help as soon as possible, and promote awareness and education to combat the stigma that surrounds mental health issues.

For more information:

<http://www.boston.com/news/education/higher/articles/2005/04/17/colleges_target_mental_health/>

<<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2005/04/18/engage>>

<<http://www.activemindsoncampus.org/>>

PARC CORNER. . .

The Positive Aging Resource Center is looking for a few good role models

The Positive Aging Resource Center (PARC) is looking for older adults who would like to share their stories of dealing with or overcoming a mental illness. PARC believes that one of the best ways to educate others about mental health and reduce the stigma of mental illness is to highlight those who have experienced and/or triumphed over a mental illness.

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In addition, PARC is looking for “positive aging role model” nominees. A positive aging role model is someone who embraces aging with grace, enthusiasm, and vigor: someone who makes the best of every day. Nominate a friend, a neighbor, a family member. You can also nominate yourself.

These stories will be highlighted on the PARC website. If interested, please contact Noelle Downing, Director of Consumer Education at <ndowning@partners.org>

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