

The Key Update

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

Volume 1 No. 2 – July 12, 2004

<http://www.mhselfhelp.org>

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SELF-ADVOCACY AND SELF-CARE RESOURCES...

HIPAA PROTECTS THE PRIVACY OF MEDICAL RECORDS

During the past year, most people have either heard the term "HIPAA," or have seen it used in "privacy notices" displayed in pharmacies, clinics, and hospitals. The term is an abbreviation for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, a federal law that requires doctors, hospitals, and insurers to keep consumers' medical records confidential. Although sharing information with other health care providers for treatment purposes is generally acceptable, other uses of the information, such as for marketing or insurance purposes, are not permitted. The law also prohibits providers from sharing information with friends or family without the consumer's permission. More information about HIPAA, including how to safeguard privacy, is available from the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), at <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/>

LIMITED HEALTH LITERACY PREVENTS MILLIONS FROM EFFECTIVELY MANAGING ILLNESS

Health Literacy Alert: Almost half of all Americans have difficulty understanding health information, including information on health risks, medication dosage and side effects. According to a recently released report of the Institute of Medicine, 90 million people -- a majority of whom are native-English speakers -- do not effectively comprehend health information provided for them. Limited health literacy is a problem across all medical conditions. This means that many people lack knowledge of practices for self-care and important aspects of disease management, including skills to prevent relapse or worsening of disease symptoms, and awareness of how to properly self-administer essential medication. The Institute of Medicine report, entitled Health Literacy: a prescription to end confusion, points out that lower health literacy is associated with more emergency room visits, hospitalization and generally higher health-care costs. For more information visit <http://www.iom.edu/report.asp?id=19723>.

RESOURCES FOR CONSUMER-RUN ORGANIZATIONS AND SELF-HELP GROUPS... GUIDE TO DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

The Council on Quality and Leadership has a new, free publication entitled "Guide to Developing and Supporting Boards of Directors." The guide is composed of lists of brainstorming and problem-solving

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questions that help an organization's staff leaders and board members define roles and communicate to maximize board effectiveness. Not all of the questions are relevant to all boards since each organization and board has different strengths and weaknesses. However, the questions are designed to help an organization develop orientation and support to address board members' unspoken assumptions, as such assumptions may create power inequities, goal conflicts, or misunderstandings about management needs, which in turn may hinder the board's usefulness. Sample questions: What are the values of this organization? How do we express these values in our services? How can we balance over-control with under-control? How do we avoid micro-managing? The guide can be downloaded for free at the following Web site:

<http://www.thecouncil.org/council/BoardGuide.pdf>.

HUMAN RIGHTS...

CRISIS INTERVENTION TRAINING PROGRAM FOR JAIL GUARDS HAS POTENTIAL TO BECOME NATIONAL MODEL

Guards in a Maine county jail are receiving training in crisis de-escalation techniques and other methods to better handle situations in which an inmate who may have a mental illness may threaten to harm himself or others, according to the Mental Health E-News (New York Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services). The goal is to provide a safer environment by taking a new approach to dealing with inmates' inexplicable behavior. In the past, guards either ignored such behavior or demanded that it stop. An Associated Press story in Foster's Online ("Program to ease tensions inside Androscoggin County Jail could become a model," June 7, 2004) notes that the newly trained correctional officers were alerted to problems 29 times in the first six months of the program and were able to de-escalate the situation without using force in all but one instance. The effectiveness of the program, which began in December 2003 when 10 correctional officers received a week of training on such topics as substance abuse, legal issues and psychiatric medications, will be studied by NAMI-Maine. If found to be effective, the program may be promoted as a national model.

http://www.fosters.com/june_2004/june_07_04/news/ap_me_0607a.asp

PARC CORNER – OLDER ADULTS & MENTAL HEALTH...

PARC EMPHASIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF MANAGEMENT

In addition to medication and talk therapy, self-management is an important tactic on the road to recovery from depression and other mental illnesses. Self-management can be defined as individuals' active involvement in their own care. Self-management strategies include

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keeping your body healthy through exercise and eating well, nurturing your spirit by doing things you feel passionate about and belief in your faith or higher power, and staying involved by connecting with friends and volunteering. Self-management also includes taking charge of your own health care, asking questions about your treatment and medications, and educating yourself. If you are an older adult, and you have a personal story on self-management that you would like to share with others dealing with depression, please email Noelle Downing at ndowning@partners.org.

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION POLICY...

BAZELON CENTER: MOST STATES ARE ENACTING OLMSTEAD REFORMS AT A SNAIL'S PACE

On June 22, 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Olmstead v. L.C.* that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guarantees people the right to treatment in the community rather than institutions. However, states have been slow to implement the decision, often blaming budgetary constraints. On the fifth anniversary of the court's decision, the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law criticized the states' failure to provide adequate community-based services. Noted legal director Ira Burnim, "Rhetoric has far outstripped action to promote community services for people with mental illnesses. States are quick to trumpet their limited efforts to implement *Olmstead*, but these have produced little actual movement of people with mental illnesses into integrated community settings." For information about the *Olmstead* decision and states' planning efforts, visit

<http://www.bazelon.org/issues/disabilityrights/resources/olmstead/index.htm>

TEXAS SYSTEMS-CHANGE INITIATIVE FOCUSES SERVICES ON RECOVERY

A special issue of the *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* (Spring 2004) is devoted to describing the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation's Benefit Design Initiative (BDI) – an effort to improve the ability of the public mental health system to target recovery-oriented services such as skills training, supported employment, and supported housing to consumers that need them. The BDI seeks to change the Texas system by clarifying how services can better match consumers' needs and how limited resources can be used more effectively. A goal of the initiative is to reduce the variability of access to recovery-oriented programs. The BDI's benefit package, which defines sets of services for which consumers are eligible, was designed on the basis of extensive reviews of the evidence supporting psychosocial rehabilitation programs as well as a consensus process

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that drew input from a wide range of stakeholders. In addition to describing the systems-change initiative, the spring issue of this journal features articles describing the evidence base for important recovery-oriented programs, including case management, supported housing, supported employment, treatment for co-occurring mental health and addictive disorders, skills training, and peer support/peer-run programs. See the journal's Web site for an overview of these articles: <http://www.bu.edu/prj/spring2004/index.html>

MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT AND SERVICES..

DIET LINKED TO MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN THE UK

Medical experts are warning of an increase in mental health problems due to changes in the British population's diet, according to Independent.Co.UK. These experts are urging the populace to increase their consumption of oily fish such as mackerel and tuna to increase intake of omega-3 fatty acids. The cause of the problem is changes in farming and food over the last 20 years. Omega-3 fatty acids are linked to both mental health and brain development and can also be found in some vegetables, such as cabbage and Brussels sprouts. Scientists feel that unless the government steps in and highlights the role that diet plays in health, things could get worse.

http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/health_medical/story.jsp?story=535590

ANNOUNCEMENTS..

Marie Verna, Director of Consumer Advocacy for the Mental Health Association in New Jersey, is seeking information from consumer advocates about states' involuntary outpatient commitment (IOC) policies. The information is sought to help inform consumers' efforts to impact the policy planning process as New Jersey considers implementing an IOC policy. Please send information to: Marie D. Verna, Director of Consumer Advocacy, Mental Health Assn. in New Jersey, 121 N. Broad Street, Second Floor, Trenton, NJ 08608; (609) 656-0110; mverna@mhanj.org

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