
The Key Update

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

Volume 1 No. 3 – July 26, 2004

<http://www.mhselfhelp.org>

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HUMAN RIGHTS...

COALITION CALLS FOR AN END TO JUVENILE DEATH PENALTY

A coalition of medical and mental health organizations filed an amicus curiae brief on July 19 calling for an end to the juvenile death penalty. The groups state that the juvenile death penalty is unacceptable because adolescents are less developed than adults and differ from them in several key areas – such as underestimating risks and overestimating short-term benefits, and being more emotionally volatile as well as more susceptible to stress – and therefore should not be held to the same standard of culpability. In addition, most, if not all, juveniles on death row have experienced severe abuse, neglect, trauma and other mental problems that exacerbate the vulnerabilities of youth, according to the brief, filed by the American Medical Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Society for Adolescent Psychiatry, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, and the National Mental Health Association. The U.S. Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in *Roper v. Simmons* during the October 2004 session. In August 2003, the Missouri Supreme Court overturned the death sentence of Christopher Simmons on the ground that it violated the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment. The Simmons briefs are available at

<http://www.abanet.org/crimjust/juvjus/simmons/simmonsamicus> or

<http://www.cjedfund.org> <<http://www.cjedfund.org/>> . For more

information on the death penalty and juveniles, please go to

<http://www.nmha.org/position/deathpenalty/index.cfm>. Source: National

Mental Health Association

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BASTILLE DAY MARKED BY VIGIL ON NEW YORK STATE CAPITOL LAWN

From 1 p.m. July 11 through 1 p.m. July 15, The Mental Patients Liberation Alliance, a 30-year-old advocacy organization based in Utica, N.Y., held its 24th Bastille Day Celebration/Demonstration. The goal of the 72-hour fast and vigil, on the East Lawn of the New York State Capitol Building, was to call attention to concerns about controversial psychiatric treatments, including involuntary commitment, electroconvulsive treatment (ECT), and forced medication. The event was part of a simultaneous worldwide initiative coordinated through Support Coalition International, a network of more than 100 grassroots groups

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and individuals that advocate around human rights issues in the mental health arena.

Source: Mental Patients Liberation Alliance

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COMMUNITY INTEGRATION POLICY...

NEW YORK CITY SEEKS TO REDUCE HOMELESSNESS THROUGH SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Hoping to slash homelessness by two thirds, New York City plans to expand its successful supportive housing program -- which links new housing to intensive social services -- to homeless families, people released from prison, and former foster children who have "aged out" of the system. Previously, the program has largely been confined to single people, most of whom had severe mental illnesses or diseases such as AIDS. The supportive housing program, which may include mandatory monitoring by social workers, works by creating "one-stop shopping," where the services people need are provided near where they live. However, although some experts believe that supportive housing is the way to go, others are more skeptical. For example, Dennis Culhane of the University of Pennsylvania, author of the study indicating the success of the program for single people, said he was not sure that creating new supportive housing units for families was justified, since they were more expensive than subsidized rent vouchers and, most of the time, a rent voucher was all it took to keep families from relapsing into homelessness. "These families are not service-needy," he told The New York Times.

Source: The New York Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/19/nyregion/19housing.html?pagewanted=all>

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PARC CORNER -- OLDER ADULTS AND MENTAL HEALTH...

PARC LAUNCHES CONSUMER EDUCATION WEB SITE

The Positive Aging Resource Center (PARC) has launched a consumer education Web site, www.positiveaging.org, designed to educate older adults and their families on mental health, encourage healthy aging and decrease the stigma associated with both mental health and aging. The PARC Web site is distinguished by interactive features, and includes the personal stories of older adults who have overcome the challenges of mental illness and aging. According to a National Mental Health Association survey on attitudes and beliefs about clinical depression, approximately 68 percent of adults aged 65 and over know little to

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nothing about depression, yet 34 million Americans aged 65 and older experience some form of depression. This consumer-friendly Web site is designed to directly address this issue and provide older adults and family members with information necessary to promote positive aging.

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MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT AND SERVICES...

MANY PEOPLE GET LITTLE OR NO FOLLOW-UP AFTER INITIAL TREATMENT FOR DEPRESSION

Lack of follow-up care by primary physicians in the treatment of depression is one of the main reasons why treatment doesn't work, according to a study published in the Archives of Internal Medicine. Even with treatment, only 23 percent of people seen by their primary care doctors get better. The study, by Eli Lilly & Company, manufacturer of the popular antidepressant Prozac, reported that most people given "adequate care," which usually consists of antidepressant medication only, still report symptoms of depression six months later. People were initially prescribed antidepressants but no specific follow-up steps were taken for the next six months. Better follow-up care for depression is one way to improve the potential for health and productivity, the study suggested.

Source: Pittsburgh Post-Gazette <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/04202/348665.stm>

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