

The Key Update

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

Volume 2 No. 1 June 2005

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

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SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS...

NMHA Honors Longtime Human Rights Advocate Pat Risser

Patrick A. Risser, a mental health consumer and human rights advocate, is the winner of this year's Clifford W. Beers Award, presented by the National Mental Health Association (NMHA) at its annual conference on June 11 at the Hyatt Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

The Beers Award, NMHA's highest honor, is given in memory of Clifford W. Beers, the founder of the National Mental Health Association and America's volunteer mental health advocacy movement. Created in 1976, the Beers Award has been presented annually to a consumer of mental health and/or substance abuse services who best fits the image of Clifford W. Beers in efforts to improve conditions for and attitudes toward people with mental illnesses.

In his letter nominating Risser for the award, Joseph Rogers, President and CEO of the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania, wrote: "While Pat's invaluable contributions to the areas of case management, recovery, empowerment and other fields speak for themselves, a vita cannot convey the personal qualities that have truly distinguished him as a leader among activists in mental health. Pat inspires others with his courage, wisdom, and compassion; takes risks for a greater good; and warmly extends himself to others. He has successfully brought many people together around common values and goals, encouraging and nurturing them. He is always reaching for a higher goal and challenges others to also aspire to their dreams. He brings respect and love to all his work and, in doing so, he forges a community around him that fosters growth and healing. I can think of no one more deserving of recognition for his years of service in mental health and contributions to the community."

Antidepressants in Last Trimester May Affect Babies

The FDA and drug companies recently agreed to a labeling change for all SRIs – which include selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) - to warn physicians about potential adverse events in newborns who are exposed in utero. SRIs are most commonly used to treat depression or other mood disorders. The most cases of side effects to newborns reported involved paroxetine (Paxil) and fluoxetine (Prozac) exposure. Newborns primarily display respiratory, central nervous system motor and gastrointestinal signs that usually disappear after 2 weeks. No reports of neonatal deaths attributable to neonatal SRI exposure have been reported.

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It is strongly recommended that women who are on any medication and are trying to get pregnant or who are pregnant consult with their psychiatrist or physician immediately, to avoid possible serious harm to their children.

Source: JAMA Vol. 293 No. 19, May 18, 2005

HUMAN RIGHTS...

Celebrity Flap Highlights Scientology vs. Mental Illness Treatment

When box-office star Tom Cruise made disparaging remarks about Brooke Shields in reference to her recently released book on recovery from severe postpartum depression, mental illness made headline news. In an interview on Access Hollywood, Cruise, a Scientologist, criticized Shields' use of Paxil. In a subsequent interview on the Today Show, Cruise declared that psychiatry, psychology and mental illness are mythic and pseudo-scientific, asserting that there is no scientific basis to the concept that mental illness is related to chemical imbalances. (The Citizens Commission on Human Rights, established by the Church of Scientology, is an outspoken opponent of psychiatry.)

Numerous mental health organizations, including the National Mental Health Association (NMHA) and American Psychiatric Association, called Cruise's pronouncements "dangerous," "misinformed" and "unfortunate." "Cruise's comments could have very damaging consequences for Americans with mental health needs by increasing stigma and shame, discouraging treatment and forcing people to go without needed care," said NMHA president and CEO Mike Faenza. "Celebrities, like Cruise, have an organic platform to share their talents and their viewpoints. However, this opportunity comes hand-in-hand with a responsibility to not mislead the American public with unfounded rhetoric."

RESOURCES FOR CONSUMER-RUN ORGANIZATIONS & SELF-HELP GROUPS...

New Web Page Highlights Stories of Recovery

On June 10, the Elimination of Barriers Initiative (EBI) unveiled an update to its Web page featuring personal accounts of recovery from mental illness. The EBI is a three-year initiative launched in September 2003 by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to identify effective public education approaches to counter the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illnesses, reduce barriers to treatment, and build public support for recovery, community-based treatment and support services.

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Research has shown that contact between people who have mental illnesses and the general public is the most effective way to reduce the discrimination and stigma associated with mental illnesses. Toward that end, the EBI Web site highlights stories of recovery revealing that people with mental illnesses lead active, productive lives and contribute to their communities. For more information, go to <<http://www.allmentalhealth.samhsa.gov/mystory.html>.> If you would like to share your story of recovery from mental illness, please contact <<mailto:info@mhselfhelp.org>> for more information.

New Title Strengthens Literature and Research on Peer-to-Peer Programs

An anthology on peer programs for people who have mental illnesses was recently published by Vanderbilt University Press. On Our Own, Together: Peer Programs for People with Mental Illness, edited by Sally Clay with Bonnie Schell, Patrick W. Corrigan, and Ruth O. Ralph, covers the eight successful peer-run services that were the focus of the Consumer-Operated Services Program (COSP) Multisite Research Initiative, a federally funded national effort to discover to what extent consumer-operated programs, as an adjunct to traditional mental health services, improve the outcomes of people with serious mental illnesses. The programs included drop-in centers (Mental Health Client Action Network, Santa Cruz, Calif.; Portland Coalition for the Psychiatrically Labeled, Portland, Maine; The St. Louis Empowerment Center, St. Louis, Mo.; and PEER Center, Inc., Oakland Park, Fla.); educational programs (Advocacy Unlimited, Inc., Conn.; and BRIDGES in Tennessee); and peer-support/mentoring programs (GROW in Illinois; and The Friends Connection, Philadelphia, Pa.).

This anthology, which has earned praise from such internationally renowned researchers as William A. Anthony, Courtenay M. Harding, and Patricia E. Deegan, also features information on the history, philosophy, and evidence base of peer-run programs. It is currently distributed through the publisher and will soon be available from a number of booksellers. For more information about the book and how to order it, visit the On Our Own Together Web site: <<http://www.sallyclay.net/z.together/ooo.html>.>

SELF-ADVOCACY AND SELF-CARE RESOURCES...

STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION...

Structural Stigma Widespread in the Media and State Legislation

Newly published research underscores the issue of structural stigma, in which social forces reinforce prejudicial and discriminatory views of people with mental illnesses.

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Two studies by Patrick Corrigan, director of the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Evanston Northwestern Healthcare in Illinois, and colleagues, published in the June issue of *Psychiatric Services*, show that structural stigma is perpetuated more than reduced by state governments and the media as a whole.

Researchers at the Chicago Consortium on Stigma Research (headed by Corrigan) reviewed 3,353 newspaper articles from 250 major newspapers during six weeks in 2002. They found that the majority (39 percent) of these stories focused on dangerousness and violence, and that such stories most often made the front page, further perpetuating a pernicious stereotype associated with mental illness. They also found that relatively few stories (4 percent) featured positive depictions of recovery while about 20 percent focused on advocacy efforts to build resources and support for mental health programming.

In a second study, an analysis of 968 bills related to mental health that were passed in state legislatures in 2002 demonstrated that states continue to enact legislation that restricts the rights of people with mental illnesses — more than 75 percent of passed bills that related to civil liberties reduced them. Also, although 112 bills were passed that enhanced protections for people with mental illnesses (by preventing discrimination in child custody, for example), just about the same number (108) reduced such protections.

For detailed information about legislation related to mental illness in your (or any) state, see <<http://www.stigmaresearch.org/projects/legis/>>

To learn more about mental illness stigma, prejudice and discrimination, visit <<http://www.stigmaresearch.org>> or <<http://www.adscenter.org>>

Community Integration Tools

Child Custody Loss Significant Barrier for Mothers with Mental Illnesses

New research by faculty of the UPenn Collaborative on Community Integration has found that mothers who have been diagnosed with serious mental illnesses such as Bipolar Disorder are significantly more likely to have cases with child welfare agencies that include challenges to and loss of custody of their children. Additionally, mothers' rights to custody are easily and systematically removed in many states simply because they have psychiatric disorders, even when it is not proven that they are not capable parents.

Technical assistance and resources for learning more about child care and custody for parents with mental illnesses can be obtained through UPenn Collaborative's "Parenting

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with a Mental Illness" Community Integration Tools series, which include an in-depth tools on Child Welfare and Custody and promoting Child Resilience. See the website for download at <<http://www.upennrrtc.org>.>

Or find out more at NMHA's Invisible Children's Project page—

<<http://www.nmha.org/children/invisible.cfm>.>

PARC Corner

Aging Well: Eating Right for Women over 55

As we get older, our bodies change, and so do the nutrients they need. A few key things to remember next time you are at the grocery store are:

1. Calcium is crucial to bone strength. You need at least 1200 milligrams of calcium a day to maintain strong bones.
2. Eating iron-rich foods every day is important. Just 15 milligrams of iron will help build muscle proteins.
3. Become a label reader. Taking a few seconds to read the nutrition facts is an easy way to help you cut back on fat and salt.
4. Bypass the junk food isle. Snacking itself isn't bad for you. In fact, it's a great way to boost your energy throughout the day. The key to snacking well is munching on healthy alternatives, such as whole grains, low-fat yogurt, and fruit.

For more information on how to eat well, please visit:

<http://www.positiveaging.org/consumer/hl_nutrition.html>

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