



Greetings on behalf of the Peer Advisory Committee

January 2016

Howdy and Happy New Year to all our readers, on behalf of our NAMI St. Louis Advisory Committee, may this year be a prosperous and joyful one! May this also be a productive year. Please don't forget the February 24 Legislative Day up on the state capitol hill in Jefferson City.

Well, the holidays are over and we look ahead to a full year's agenda of things to do, but remember to leave some leisure time for yourself, to relax and take good care of yourself.

It is not too early to start planning for NAMIWalks which will be Saturday May 28 this year. Starting a team is a great way to raise awareness and funds for NAMI St. Louis, and be sure to watch the website (namistl.org) for information.

Christopher Lee

Chair, Peer Advisory Committee

"Service can be given wherever there are people." Wings of Silver by Jo Petty

Check our website for
more information at
www.namistl.org,
or give us a call at
314-962-4670.

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Three Easy Steps to Becoming a Mental Health Advocate

By Gabe Howard



I receive a lot of e-mail, direct messages, and phone calls asking me a variety of questions. With the exception of specific questions about living with mental illness, the most asked question has to do with my advocacy work or how to become an advocate themselves. While there is no guarantee what part you can play in the advocacy world, literally anyone can become a mental health advocate by following these three easy steps.

Becoming a Mental Health Advocate, Step One

The first step toward becoming a mental health advocate is to remove all expectations. I truly mean all expectations. Don't expect to become the next Patrick Kennedy, Pete Earley, or even a well-read blogger like me or many others. You simply cannot know where you will fit in or how long it will take to reach any level.

If the sole reason you want to be a mental health advocate is to help people, then losing expectations is easy. Ask to help at a local consumer-operated service, fund-raise for a mental health charity, or sign up to volunteer for the suicide hotline. Doing any one of those things will make you a mental health advocate. Beyond that, you can just enjoy the journey and see where you end up.

Step Two to Becoming a Mental Health Advocate

Many people, myself included, are not satisfied just volunteering for a local mental health charity. In fact, we aren't happy until being a mental health advocate has taken over our identity. In addition to my full-time job, I am a professional speaker, writer, and a volunteer for the cause. I work in mental health, volunteer in mental health, and use every moment to advocate on behalf of people living with mental illness. People like me.

If step one doesn't satisfy you, then step two is the acknowledgement that you don't want to be *just* a mental health advocate. You want to be a *paid* mental health advocate. There is nothing wrong with this. This kind of work is expensive and time consuming. It costs a lot of money to maintain this level of output. Internet, office space, and transportation costs add up. Plus, we need to eat and pay

rent. It's important to approach this as a business. It's easy to get sucked into working for free, and there is nothing wrong with that. However, your landlord and creditors will probably not care *why* you don't have money.

The Final Step to Complete Your Mental Health Advocate Transformation

The final step to completing your mental health advocacy transformation is the hardest one. Be prepared to fail. Not just fail, but fail *publicly*. I have often speculated that the term "epic fail" must have come from someone watching a mental health advocate at work.



When I was a young and naive advocate, I thought I could effect real and lasting change in a matter of weeks. I would just explain to people that they were wrong, enlighten them to my way of thinking, and be home in time for dinner. I have been at this for almost a decade and, while certain things have improved, we still have more work in front of us than we do behind us.

Advocacy at this level needs to be your life's work and you must learn to celebrate the tiny victories because there is more failure on a day-to-day basis than there is success. There isn't enough money, understanding, or education to change the minds of an entire country overnight. Brace yourself; this is a going to take a while.

New Type of Antidepressant Shows Promise in Early Trial

TUESDAY, Dec. 8, 2015 (HealthDay News) – Millions of Americans battle depression, and many search for a medication that can help ease the condition. Now, researchers report in a small, early trial that an experimental antidepressant may be a safe and effective new option.

"We need more treatments for depression," said Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein, president of the Brain & Behavior Research Foundation in New York City. "Current treatments for depression are effective for many people, but they don't work for everyone."

"This study looks at a new, potential medication with a different mechanism of action than currently available antidepressants," said Borenstein, who was not involved in the study.

The drug, known only as NSI-189, is meant to stimulate production of new brain cells – a process called neurogenesis.

This phase 1 study included 24 adults with major depression who were randomly assigned to take either the drug or a placebo for 28 days. They were then followed for another 56 days.

Patients who took the drug showed improvements in depression symptoms. And, the effects appeared to last for several months after they stopped taking the drug, according to the study published online Dec. 8 in the journal *Molecular Psychiatry*.

The study was funded by Neuralstem, the company that is developing the drug.

"Our study finds that this novel compound promotes neurogenesis in a specific part of the brain, is well tolerated and may have robust antidepressant effects," study author Dr. Maurizio Fava, executive director of the Clinical Trials Network & Institute at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, said in a hospital news release.

"If its efficacy is confirmed in larger trials, this drug could be an important new option for patients not helped by currently available medications," Fava said.

Rates of side effects were similar between those taking the new drug and those on a placebo, the study authors said.

A larger trial of the drug is already underway.

Borenstein said that, "Although this is a small preliminary study, the results are promising and indicate that more work should be done."

To Be One With Nature

By Scott Galyon

I approach the lake observing 30 long neck Canadian geese. The leader goose honked several times, commanding the other geese to fly south. They flew fast, flapping their wings loudly.

I began to fish with a sign of relief, knowing I was out of harm's way. The big blue gill took my bobber under. I suddenly jerked back, catching a two pound crappie.

To be one with nature is to be one with God. The fog is surrounding my 1989 power blue Buick Century, my mother, Juanita gave me. Sitting on Target's parking lot on North Lindbergh waiting for my wife to buy me stud earrings and Pharrell's Girl CD with my favorite happy song, I was turning in my beverage cans to Nationwide's Recycling factory.

A homeless man named Dell brought a cart to redeem the money, \$12. He slept by the big tree with his German Shephard under a plastic tent on New Halls Ferry off Chambers in North County. He took a bus to get an occasional shower and was out of propane to heat himself. The man who owns a scrap yard hires all homeless people. It kind of reminds me of what Jesus said in the bible: The foxes have holes, the birds have nests, but I have no place to rest my head.

To be with nature is to be with God. Dog spelled backwards is God.

Anticipating

By Karl Miller

Someone might ask: "How is your new year going?" You might say: "Oh, it is just another day." Then the one who asked you that will say: "You are right. It is just another day-same number of hours in it; weather is still weather, however you could have died yesterday."

As some of our friends and relatives might pass away, let us have faith that when they get to Heaven they will shout aloud to us and others from up above. "His yoke is easy, His burden light".

Let's put our grudges away and deal with all those things we cannot solve on our own!

Happy New Year!

Balanced Living for People with Mental Illness

By Rebecca Milovich

As a 54 year old woman with schizo-affective disorder, I have had my ups and downs in life, from hearing voices to depression and sleep deprivation to anorexia. My mental state is like fragile petals of a flower that need to be tended to. I must make a conscious effort every day for my well being.

It is documented that 8 hours of sleep is needed for healthy living. I have to have 10 to feel rested. If I sleep longer, my joints ache. But I can get by with 10. People with mental illnesses need to be careful to eat healthy, sleep well and even illness can cause a relapse in remission. We are fragile like flowers. The right amount is key. Over the next several pages, I will go over some balances to make life a little easier. Hope you find it helpful. Your friend, Rebecca.

Staying Strong

I was sick in bed several years ago. I didn't get up for three months. My muscles atrophied. That means my muscles lost their strength. I had to go through physical therapy and learn how to strengthen my muscles again. It was then that I realized how easy it can be to lose your muscles.

During depression, we can find ourselves in bed a lot. This is very dangerous, not only for our mental state, but for our physical state as well. While in remission, there is plenty that we can do to keep our muscles in working order. Talk to your doctor about a program that is easy to do and fun. I do just 5 yoga positions a day and 5 strengthening exercises. It doesn't have to consume your life, but a few well thought out activities can relieve stress, relax and strengthen you as well. You will feel better in the long run mentally too.

Relaxation

I am learning to meditate. I am making it part of my daily regimen. I meditate now at 10am and at 2pm. It doesn't have to be a long, drawn out process. I am just taking 5 minutes to hum and clear my mind. I say the word hmm, like wondering. I focus on something and try to clear my mind of thoughts. Its good to get into a comfortable position. I will relax and think of nothing. I will concentrate on my humming and the object that I am looking at. It is a good stress reliever. There is nothing religious about it. It is just a sound. You can pick what you look at. It is a technique to use in recovery.

There are other meditations. You can close your eyes and imagine you are on a beach somewhere. The waves are coming in and going out. It's relaxing. Medication helps us deal with stress throughout the day. It gives us the strength to withstand it because we have spent time coping with it. We all feel stress. It's normal. We won't get away from it. But we can guard ourselves and meditation can help us do that along with other healthy activities like exercise and healthy food. It's all a balance.

Schedules

When I think of schedules, I think of work. But I have made a very easy schedule to remind myself of things. My main schedule is morning, afternoon, evening and night. I have four things to do. Then I set certain times that I want to accomplish things that take only 5 to 15 minutes. I will set the event on my calendar in my phone or write it down on my daily planner. It keeps me organized and I do so much more in a day than I would otherwise. And at the end of the day I feel good because I did everything I wanted to do.

Of course, I have to live life on life's terms. And schedules don't always work out because of appointments and grocery shopping and just plain sick or rainy days. That's when I have to realize that the work can wait. This past week and a half I was out every day. I had to prioritize. I was sick too. I had to take naps and be in places at certain times and still write to my daughter in college. It worked out, I had to skip a lot of things and rearrange some of my schedule. I was able to get back into a regular schedule again though. So things are slowing down. But it's all of the things that I usually do on my schedule that helped me when I was busy. I looked forward to my schedule. You can too.

Relationships

I am a writer, so I spend a lot of time alone, writing. Ever hear that people who spend a lot of time alone start talking to themselves? I have to be careful that I don't fall back into myself. I stop and call someone every once in awhile just to stay connected to the world or get out somewhere, even if it's just to the library. I have to make a conscious effort to relate to people.

I am not the world's best communicator, but I can hold a conversation that includes the weather and what I have been doing lately, even if it's just chores. Meeting people through the YMCA or through a church can be a good way to make friends. I have done both and have a couple of good friends that visit me from time to time. For more shy people, there are clubhouses for the mentally ill that provide activities. They play cards and go shopping. Check with your local NAMI. No one should be alone. People need people. It's healthy.

Nutrition

Three meals a day and two snacks get me by. I am not gaining or losing weight. I don't overeat, but I have enough to make me full. I try to stay away from junk food. I make each meal balanced. I get in fruit, grain, vegetables and meats every day. It's a conscious effort though. I'm not watching my weight anymore. I'm just trying to stay mentally stable.

Planning healthy meals can be grueling. I make my shopping list, I try to list staples like potatoes and rice. I try to get different foods too. That way I don't miss anything and I don't get tired of the same meal. But I still have to take some time out at 3pm to figure out what I'm going to have for supper. So I will be ready to prepare it at 4:30pm. It's a challenge, but it's worth it to have a good dinner. Bon A Petit!

Hobbies

I try to keep several interests and hobbies. These are my coping strategies. Things I enjoy doing. They make my life worthwhile, crocheting for the hospital or taking a class. These are small things I do in my life, but they are as important as taking my medicine. Talk to your doctor about these things and come up with a plan that will fit your lifestyle.

It all goes hand-in-hand. Balanced living is something that people without mental illnesses could benefit from too. It has taken me years to get where I am today. But I'm moving forward. I was able to receive help from my doctors, caring health professionals and friends. I hope you are able to do the same.

Your friend, Rebecca.

NAMI ST. Louis
1750 S Brentwood Blvd, Ste 511
St. Louis, MO 63144
www.namistl.org

Phone: 555-555-5555
Fax: 555-555-5555
Email: someone@example.com

Newsletter Mission:

The newsletter, established by the NAMI St. Louis Consumer Advisory Committee, will tell the stories of individuals with mental illness who are doing interesting things. It is a forum for information, inspiration, and creative expression.

Publication Guidelines

- Materials should be from individuals living with mental illness in the St. Louis area, unless invited by the Consumer Advisory Committee.
- In an attempt to decrease stigma and isolation that often accompany mental illness, we ask that you identify yourself by providing your name, address, and either phone number or email address. You will be contacted if there are questions about your material. You will also be contacted if your material or question is published. Names will be published, but no other identifying information will be made public.
- Items for publication should be free from profanity or language that is prejudicial toward any culture, race, religion, gender, type of mental illness, or type of disability.
- Submission does not guarantee publication. Items are published at the discretion of the Consumer Advisory Committee.
- Please keep stories, articles, and poetry to two pages or less. Please do not send originals as they will not be returned.
- Submissions may be made by email, U.S. Mail, or fax.

Newsletter Editor:
Sharon Lyons
Newsletter Graphic Designer:
Ann Stackle

Peer Advisory Committee
Chair:
Christopher Lee
Members:
Arlen Chaleff
Ellen Rosenbaum
Joanie Milligan
Sharon Lyons
Helene Gottesmann

NAMI St. Louis
1750 S. Brentwood Blvd, Suite 511
St. Louis, MO 63144
Phone: 314-962-4670, Fax: 314-962-4678, Email: Sharon@namistl.org

