

From the Publisher

There are “No Old Topics” When it Comes to Mental Health Education

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I was recently asked “Why do you keep revisiting the same old topics over again in *Mental Health News*?” I did not have a cute or definitive answer at the moment. However, as I sit here writing this column, I am convinced that it is because you can never cover a good topic often enough. Each time you do, something new and wonderful always seems to rise to the surface.

Mental Health News examined the topic of Schizophrenia back in the fall of 2005, and a remarkable thing happened when I pulled the five year old newspaper from my files and began reading through it. I came upon a most moving article called “Trapped in a Fugue: Jimmy’s Story” by Mindy Appel, ACSW, LCSW. Mindy wrote about her brother Jimmy and his tragic battle with Schizophrenia. If you haven’t read it, I urge you to go to our website at www.mhnews.org, go to the “back issues” tab on the upper toolbar, click on our fall 2005 issue, and go to page 12. I bring up this article now because it illuminates how helpless a family can become in trying to cope with a loved one who has developed a mental illness. These feelings of helplessness extend not only to the clinical management of the illness, but also to the extreme harshness brought on by the stigma towards people with mental illness. I also bring up this article because it has such personal meaning to me. You see, Mindy is a first cousin of mine, and I did not know of Jimmy’s illness until Mindy shared it with me and the readers of this publication back then in 2005—some 30 years after Jimmy was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

As I sit here writing, I think back on my childhood and realize how common it was for families back in the 1950’s to sweep emotional problems under the rug. Looking back, I never understood why I hadn’t become closer with my cousins Mindy and Jimmy. Had our family’s closely-held secrets kept us apart? Jimmy, Mindy and I were not that far apart in age, and it is as tragic and ironic that I too would fall victim to a devastating mental illness (although later in life) as Jimmy had as a young adult.



Ira H. Minot, LMSW

I knew I had to devote this column to the topic of how families and the public in general need to be continually reminded to be more open and less afraid of mental illness. I turned to the internet for inspiration and came upon a news item just recently posted entitled “Glenn Close and Family Tackle Stigma of Mental Illness.” I clicked on the link and was brought to an ABC News page with an October 21, 2009 article by Katie Escherich, entitled “Glenn Close and Family Tackle Stigma of Mental Illness: Actress Inspired by Sister Jessie Close, Nephew, to Raise Awareness.” There was also a wonderful video interview with Glenn Close and her sister Jessie moderated by George Stephanopoulos, as well as a link to a new nonprofit organization founded by Glenn Close called, Bring Change 2 Mind. I followed the link and found www.bringchange2mind.org. It’s a wonderful campaign to end stigma towards mental illness that has partnered with many noteworthy organization’s that are listed on the site. Bring Change 2 Mind features a series of videos shot at Grand Central Station by Director Ron Howard in which Glenn, her sister Jessie and others walk through the great plaza in Grand Central wearing simple white tee shirts with, in Jessie’s case, “Bipolar” written on it and with Glenn wearing one that simply has “Sister” written on it.

The slogan of Bring Change 2 Mind is “Change a Mind and Change a Life.” I know I speak for many in the mental health community in saluting this effort. Campaigns to end stigma, to increase community education, and to support increased funding for treatment and research, are essential to our efforts to improve the lives of people with mental illness. It is always such a powerful message when delivered by people of notoriety and fame. I think it’s terrific! I haven’t yet seen the Bring Change 2 Mind tee-shirt video ads appear on television here in Pennsylvania, but I hope they will, and hope they keep playing them over and over again. I believe that if they do, people will become less fearful and more educated in their attitudes toward mental illness—and that’s a good thing.

But you may say, “This is a message we’ve heard before.” and “Oh, another campaign to end stigma?” and “Didn’t you just have actor Joey Pantoliano on the front page of *Mental Health News* announcing an anti-stigma campaign he recently started called No Kidding Me 2?” The answer is YES!! But as I stated at the beginning of this column, you can never cover an important topic often enough—especially when there is so much work yet to be done. There are no “old topics” when it comes to mental health education.

I happen to love old movies and watch the Turner Classic Movie channel TCM. Robert Osborne, the primetime host of TCM once said, “I always say that I envy someone who hasn’t seen ‘Sunset Boulevard’ and is seeing it for the first time. That’s not an old movie then; that’s a new movie. I’m a little cynical about people who say they don’t like old movies. Would you not read ‘Huckleberry Finn’ or ‘David Copperfield’ because they’re old books? It’s so stupid to cut yourself off from so much pleasure.”

This issue of *Mental Health News* does cover an old topic, but I think you will find many wonderful things that rise to the surface from within its pages. Our two cover stories are a prime example.

Timothy Sullivan, MD, a leading authority on severe mental illness, gives us some wonderful insights into what he has learned about schizophrenia over the course of his many years in practice. He states that, “One of the critical things we have learned – though it is information that is unfortunately often not put into practice – is that

too much of the type of medication that is useful in decreasing agitation and hallucinations (antipsychotic medication) can make these thinking problems worse, so that the right amount of medicine, generally, is that which minimizes the side effects the medicine can cause.”

Our other cover story is our interview with Susan Weinreich, an award-winning artist, who gives us a courageous and personal look at her journey through the darkness of schizophrenia. In her triumphant return over the adversity she endured, she states, “I would say that recovery is absolutely possible and absolutely worth-while. The bottom line is that people with mental illness are no different from anyone else. As human beings we all have issues in our lives – whether they’re physical illnesses, mental illnesses, disabilities of any kind – we are all struggling to just get through it, develop, grow and face our challenges.”

This issue of *Mental Health News* has many more wonderful articles that examine the topic of schizophrenia from both a personal and scientific perspective. I wish to thank everyone for their participation.

Looking ahead in our calendar of upcoming themes, our spring issue will examine the topic, “A Look Into the World of Anxiety Disorders.” Our summer issue theme will be, “Addressing the Needs of Caregivers.” Next fall we will be discussing, “Mental Health Services for Children and Adolescents,” followed by next winter’s look at, “Women’s Issues in Mental Health.” Many of these topics were suggested by our readers, which I find to be a great way of staying on top of what’s important from your perspective.

These are difficult times for the mental health community. I sense from many of you that the economy’s severe impact on mental health budgets is one of the biggest challenges we are facing today. As the mental health community has often had to cope with lean years in the past, we can only hope that things will eventually get better. Pressing for the need for more mental health funding is certainly an old topic, but one that will always be first on my agenda at *Mental Health News*. I believe that “every day is mental health day” at *Mental Health News*. It’s a concept that will always drive this publication.

Have a wonderful winter season !



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