

Presidential Commission Urges Transformation of Mental Health Care in America

The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health issued its final report July 22, 2003. Appointed by President Bush a year ago, the 22 commissioners had diverse expertise in mental health including administrators, service providers, advocates and consumers.

The President asked the Commission to investigate why so many folks fall through the cracks, and what can be done about it. He cited stigma, unfair treatment limitations and insurance benefits, and fragmentation of the service delivery system as the main obstacles preventing Americans with mental illnesses from getting the care they deserve.

The Commissioners begin their report with this rather remarkable vision statement, "We envision a future when everyone with a mental illness will recover, a future when mental illnesses can be prevented or cured, a future when mental illnesses are detected early, and a future when everyone with a mental illness at any stage of life has access to effective treatment and supports- essentials for living, working, learning, and participating fully in the community". High ideals.

The Commissioners pull no punches, calling the national mental health system a "patchwork relic" and asserting that mental health care in America needs "fundamental transformation". No band-aid recommendations here.

The Commission's report points to fragmentation and gaps in care of children and adults with serious mental illnesses; high rates of unemployment and disability for adults with serious mental illnesses; lack of care for older adults with mental illnesses; lack of national priority for mental health and suicide prevention.

The Commission concluded the existing system is not oriented to the single most important goal of the people it serves—the hope of recovery. They urged a streamlined system focused on early diagnosis and treatment at the community level with a high expectation of recovery.

Richard Birkel, Executive Director of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) said of the Report, "I think it brings us out of the dark ages. The goals and standards they have set are good ones. Get people into treatment early, have high expectations of recovery. This is the opposite of what we have now. This really envisions a very modern health care system in mental health". Birkel also commented, "Was it a good report? That depends on what happens in the next six months to a year. If it works as well as we hope to stimulate action, then it will be a great report. If it's a snapshot of a system in shambles in 2003 and nothing happens, it will be a terrible report". (New York Times, July 23, 2003).

Here in North Carolina, mental health reform planning at the state level and current local efforts at the county/ area program level, are in line with the goals and recommendations of the presidential commission. The challenge: where will the money come from? The commission recommended no increased spending on mental health, instead calling for a more coordinated and efficient use of the money available now. Does that sound familiar here at the state level? "Keep your eyes on the prize." There's still a long way to go as we move from vision to results.

By Barbara Nettles-Carlson

For a print copy of the Commission's report, phone (1-800-228-0427), or find it online at www.MentalHealthCommission.gov or www.nami.org.

"Costs of Caring"

News & Observer, July 28, 2003

Navigating the mental health system in most states, including North Carolina, is a chore for just about anyone who has to attempt it. Now a national commission impaneled by President Bush offers an enlightened, solid assessment of how the mentally ill are cared for in the United States and how to modernize the system.

If the commission's report sounds familiar, it's because North Carolina has owned up to many of the same shortcomings. But the national and North Carolina proposals also share a major shortcoming of their own, which is a failure to pledge funding for the needed reforms.

There's no doubt that treating the mentally ill can be expensive. But the public pays, in jail costs, crime, homelessness and violence, when those afflicted with mental illness receive inadequate care. The high costs of inpatient care complicate treatment decisions and help create a counterproductive revolving-door pattern.

The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, created last year, recommends that each state develops a comprehensive plan—including more community services in place of short-term hospitalization, which is a centerpiece of North Carolina's reform. Mental health care in this country is largely crisis oriented, which tends to be shortsighted, and medication-oriented. That can be self-defeating when a patient isn't rational enough to stay on a medication schedule or stops taking a drug because of its debilitating side effects.

Comprehensive community services would make the system less impersonal. It's not unusual for police officers who arrest and re-arrest the mentally ill for minor scrapes with the law to be more familiar with patients than are mental health professionals, tethered to public clinics by inadequate budgets.

The goal needs to be enabling patients to live as normally as possible. The North Carolina Senate did its part this spring by protecting from raids the state Mental Health Trust Fund, which was set up to help finance the state's reform efforts. The state Department of Health and Human Services has a far-sighted plan in the making for improving the state's system, and is aggressively promoting it. Yet current funding levels clearly won't do all that's envisioned. Governor Easley needs to exert leadership if the public is to be saved from deep disappointment over promises made but not kept in caring for the mentally ill.

Nationally, President Bush's commission recommends reform but not any new spending to implement it. Tommy Thompson, the health and human services secretary, now needs to oversee development of a plan to put the commission's recommendations into effect. Meanwhile, Bush can take the lead in making the case that a compassionate nation must follow through, with action and money.

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Club Nova Thrift Shop

With your donations and purchases

Location: 103 C West Main St. Carrboro
(behind Wendy's)

Hours: Tuesday-Friday 10-6
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Clothing, jewelry, books, magazines, housewares, small appliances, electronics, furniture, toys, gifts, cards, music, and more!!

New Sharing Time Being Established

By Len Sellet

Many of you are aware that a major mission of our organization is support. Support includes providing opportunities for sharing experiences related to serious mental illness,—and, how to better handle problems, fears and concerns.

By sharing we learn from one another ways to better cope with the issues that face us as family members, consumers or friends of persons with mental illness. This process may enable us to return home better prepared to meet future challenges. In the past several years, NAMI Orange County has sponsored support meetings at various locations; these have tended to be short term and fragmented.

Our Board has recommended that the support function be integrated in regular meetings. Beginning Saturday October 11 we will provide a structure for those who wish to share to do so in a safe confidential setting.

On the second Saturday, when we normally meet at the Church of Reconciliation, those who wish to participate in sharing time will gather for a closed meeting from 9:30-10:15. Then all will join together for the educational program agenda, usually featuring a speaker, from 10:30 to 11:30.

Lenny and Sue Sellet (967-4895) will serve as the initial facilitators of sharing time. The Sellets are experienced Family-to Family leaders. Their main objectives will be to keep conversation flowing and to give each person a chance to speak. The following guidelines will apply:

- *Confidentiality (but not anonymity)
- *The group will work toward possible solutions
- *The group will not provide professional therapy, make problems go away, or enforce solutions

Refreshments and social time will continue to be available to all from 9:30 until the educational program begins at 10:30.

Awards Honor Direct Caregivers at John Umstead and UNC Neuroscience Hospitals

By Barbara Nettles-Carlson

It has become a tradition for NAMI-Orange County to recognize excellent performance among those who provide direct care to individuals hospitalized because of psychiatric illness. Two awards are given, one at John Umstead Hospital and one at UNC Neurosciences Hospital. The annual awards consist of a framed certificate and \$100. At John Umstead Hospital the award is called the Mary Magdalene Flamer Award in memory of a woman patient who was tragically killed in an auto accident several years ago.

Willie Godfrey, Health Care Technician on the Geropsychiatric Unit, received the direct caregiver award at UNC Neurosciences Hospital. Nurse manager **Kathleen Ojala** RN emphasized Mr. Godfrey's gentleness, kindness and patience in caring for geriatric patients who are often slow moving and confused, and also praised his initiative and ability to follow through in working with staff. "I wish I could clone him", she remarked. Mr. Godfrey plans to continue his education to become a registered nurse. NAMI OC member **Gary Gaddy** presented the award.

Robert Harris, Health Care Technician in the Children's Psychiatric Institute of John Umstead Hospital, is the 2003 recipient of the Mary Magdalene Flamer Award. Mr. Harris' citation reads in part, "Robert's patients trust and respect him and you can see this in the way they interact with him. They know that he is going to keep them safe, hold them accountable for their choices, be fair, and be kind. If he tells them he is going to do something, he does it. So many of our patients have not had this type of adult influence." Umstead Hospital CEO **Patsy Christian** PhD, RN, presented framed certificates to Mr. Harris and each award nominee. **Gary Gaddy, David Bibb, Ray Atwater and Barbara Nettles-Carlson** represented NAMI-OC at the award ceremony.

Sulia Mae Smith died June 2 in Chapel Hill at the age of 77 after a period of declining health. We knew her as a valued longtime member of NAMI-OC, and as the devoted mother of Club Nova member Jimmie Smith. Sulia won the respect of all who knew her. She was a woman of deep faith. Even after illness confined her to a wheelchair she remained cheerful and had a light in her eyes that made you feel good after talking with her. She is survived by nine daughters, three sons, 23 grandchildren and 24 great-grandchildren. “Her family, Club Nova, and the larger community will miss her deeply”, said Club Nova director Karen Dunn. Amen. Rest in peace.

Peggy and John Riebel have coordinated the refreshments and beverages at our meetings for “more years than we want to remember”. Having officially retired from their volunteer post, the Riebels want to express appreciation for all those who have assisted them in providing for our fellowship and refreshment needs along the way, especially **Barbara Dennis** and **Susan Sellet**. We thank you all for a job well done.

“In Our Own Voice”: Living with Mental Illness

In Our Own Voice: Living with Mental Illness is a NAMI-sponsored recovery education presentation given by trained consumer presenters for other consumers, family members, friends, professionals, and lay audiences.

“In Our Own Voice” will be the featured educational program at the NAMI-OC educational meeting, Saturday morning November 8 at the Church of Reconciliation in Chapel Hill.

Program leader will be **Tracy Mixson** of Asheville, who is a member of Western Carolina NAMI. An experienced and dynamic speaker, Tracy will lead an interactive presentation about mental illness-including video, personal testimony, and discussion.

This program is designed to enrich your understanding of how people with serious disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression cope with the reality of their illnesses while recovering and reclaiming productive lives. The presentation covers issues frequently faced by those dealing with severe mental illnesses:

- Dark Days
- Acceptance
- Treatment
- Coping Strategies
- Successes, Hopes, and Dreams

NAMI-OC is pleased to be able to bring this outstanding program to our membership and the community. This would be an excellent program to invite your friends and associates. Don’t miss it.

**Mental Illness Awareness Week
October 5-11. Theme: Take action
to change the nation.**

VINTAGE FAIRE

Calling all collectors, shoppers, and packrats

Vintage Faire, an annual fundraiser for the Mental Health Association of Orange County, is an upmarket tag sale featuring **QUALITY ITEMS** from furniture to jewelry.

Vintage Faire will happen on Saturday October 4, 8:30-5:00 and Sunday October 5, 1:00-5:00 at Eastgate Shopping Center.

Your **DONATIONS** are needed including furniture, glassware, silver, fabric, rugs, artwork, new items, and crafts. (Please, no clothes, computers or outdated sports equipment.) For information and pickup of donations, call 942-8083.

So....Mark your calendar! Have fun shopping and support the Mental Health Association.

NAMI-Orange County Fall Program Schedule

September 2

Tuesday September 2, 7PM, Watts St Baptist Church, Durham. Joint with NAMI Durham

“A Safe Affordable Decent Place to Live: What’s Happening with Housing for Adults with Mental Illness”. John Tote, Executive Director, Mental Health Association of North Carolina

October 11

Saturday October 11, 9:30-11:30AM, Church of Reconciliation, 110 Eliot Rd., Chapel Hill.

“Ask the Doctor” with Chapel Hill psychiatrist Dr. Jack Haggerty. Back by popular demand. Come with your questions, comments, concerns.

9:30AM Fellowship, Refreshments, Sharing time, *(see p. three for details about sharing time)*

10:15AM- Annual meeting, Election of officers

10:30AM Speaker

November 8

Saturday November 8, 9:30-11:30AM, Church of Reconciliation, 110 N. Eliot Rd. Chapel Hill. Joint with NAMI-Durham.

**“In Our Own Voice: Living with Mental Illness”
Presentation, video, discussion with consumer presenter Tracy Mixson**

(see article on p. four)

9:30AM Fellowship, Refreshments, Sharing time

10:30AM Speaker

Fall NAMI-OC Board of Director meetings

- Saturday, September 6, 3-5pm, Carol Woods Conference Room
- Sunday November 16, 3-5 pm, Carol Woods Conference Room

NAMI Family-to-Family Educational Program

In Chapel Hill: Sunday September 7, 3-5:30pm
Contact: Ray & Cheryle Atwater 732-1512

In Durham: Thursday September 11, 7-9:30pm
Contact: Renee Piere 919-598-7820

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NAMI_Orange County is a local affiliate of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, a non-profit organization for support, education and advocacy on behalf of individuals with severe mental illness and their families.

Information, support and referrals:

Local Helpline 929-7822

North Carolina Helpline: 1-800-451-9682

Websites

Local: www.info@namiorange.org

State: www.naminc.org

National: www.nami.org

“Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved completely in a lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing that is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love.” Reinhold Niebuhr

RECOVERY INC offers self-help techniques for anger management, stress reduction and controlling anxieties. A local Recovery group meets Friday mornings at 10:30AM at the Caramore Community Building, 550 Smith Level Rd, Carrboro. For more information, call Nita Donaldson, 918-3677.

SUPPORT GROUPS

The Mental Health Association in Orange County sponsors several groups. Meetings are held at the MHA office, 302 W.Weaver St., Carrboro, 942-8083.

Depression/Bipolar This group is for people who are in treatment for depression or bipolar disorder. The meetings are held on the first and third Wednesdays of the month from 7 to 8:30pm.

Parents and Caregivers of Children with Emotional Difficulties. (Family Advocacy Network). Through the Family Advocacy Network, families can learn coping and advocacy skills to strengthen their own family unit. These support meetings offer families a warm, friendly and confidential environment among families living in similar situations. Call Linda Boldin or Maureen Adams at MHA office to confirm. 942-8083

Schizophrenics Anonymous: A self-help support group by and for people with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorders. Meets first and third Fridays of each month, 7-8:30pm. MHA/OC office.

WEBSITES

www.mentalhelp.net. Comprehensive mental health information, news and resources

www.dbsalliance.org. Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

www.iccd.org International Center for Clubhouse Development

www.episcopalmentalillnessnetwork.org

www.faithnetnami.org. resources for faith communities. Non denominational.