



# GRASSROOTS

NAMI is the National Alliance on Mental Illness  
Newsletter of NAMI Huntsville, a grassroots affiliate of NAMI Alabama and NAMI

## Support NAMIH Rummage Sale May 2 & 3

### President's Corner

By Dr. Bill Chew

Dear Editor:

May is Mental Health Month!

As President of the Huntsville Chapter of the National Alliance for Mental Illness, NAMI-Huntsville, I want to discuss mental illness (MI) and how enlightened our Huntsville/Madison County area is in relationship to MI.

Mental illness is more prevalent than is generally believed because many people do not recognize that they or their loved ones are ill. Secondly, most people who are afflicted or whose family member is afflicted are ashamed of it and "sweep it under the rug" by not telling anyone.

Mental illness is a chemical imbalance of the brain. When the pancreas has a chemical disorder by not producing enough insulin, it is called diabetes. My mother and sister had thyroid disorder that produced too little iodine. Their hair fell out. Most people recognize that these are physical disorders and do not attach stigma to them. When the brain has a chemical disorder, however, it affects the way a person interacts with the world.

The medical research community did not start working seriously in this area until the 1970s. Much progress has been made. Now we can scan the brain and take a look at it, we can see that the brain that has MI looks different from one that does not.

The Huntsville/Madison County Alabama area is very enlightened in this subject. The MH Center has a new Director, Brian Davis, who has brought his enthusiasm, energy, and vision to the Center. We have a Mental Health Court in both Huntsville and Madison County. These courts are for those with MI who have committed misdemeanors. The Hon. Judge Sybil Cleveland, in Municipal Court and the Hon. Judge Ruth Ann Hall in Madison County Court. "sentence" offenders to a program designed specifically for them. When the ill person completes

their program satisfactorily, the misdemeanor is expunged from their record. Huntsville and

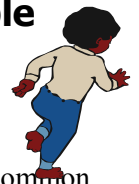
Madison County are among the first 50 such courts in the nation! Our City and County Courts are plowing new ground!

Also, North Alabama has NAMI Affiliates in Decatur, Guntersville, Huntsville, and Mussel Shoals. The affiliates offer support groups and free education programs for families coping with the MI of a loved one.

I suggest that everyone in Huntsville and Madison County take time during this Mental Health month to learn more about MI and how those afflicted with this illness are treated in our community. We have a lot for which to be proud.

### 1 in 5 kids have a diagnosable mental health problem

Reprinted from Mental Health America online.  
[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)



Children's mental health problems are real, common and treatable. Nearly two-thirds get little or no help.

Untreated mental health problems—including ADHD, bipolar disorder, depression, schizophrenia and autism—can disrupt children's functioning at home, school and in the community. Children with mental health issues are at increased risk of school failure, contact with the criminal justice system, dependence on social services, and even suicide.

Because mental health conditions impact the most complex organ in our body—our brain—there often isn't some magic sign signaling a child needs help. Parents and family members are usually the first to notice if a child has problems with emotions or behavior. Their observations, along with teachers and other caregivers, can help determine the need to



seek help for the child.

(Cont'd top next page, "Kids")

(Kids, Cont'd.)

**The following signs may indicate the need for professional help:**

- ? Decline in school performance
- ? Poor grades despite strong efforts
- ? Constant worry or anxiety
- ? Repeated refusal to go to school or to take part in normal activities
- ? Hyperactivity or fidgeting
- ? Persistent nightmares
- ? Persistent disobedience/aggression
- ? Frequent temper tantrums
- ? Depression, sadness or irritability

Early identification, diagnosis and treatment can help children reach their full potential. If a problem is suspected, talk with the child's pediatrician or contact a mental health professional.

The evaluation may include consultation with a child psychiatrist, psychological testing or medical tests to rule out any physical condition that could be causing the symptoms. A comprehensive treatment plan should include psychotherapy and, in some cases, may include medication. The plan should be developed with the family. Whenever possible, the child should be involved in treatment decisions.

## ***esperanza***

### ***hope to cope with anxiety and depression*** **A New Magazine**

In Spanish, "esperanza" means hope.

This new publication offers "hope to cope with anxiety and depression".

Inside the Preview Issue, Spring 2008, you will find the following:

- "When It's Not Just Nerves", finding balance.
- "Gliding Through Depression", featuring Olympic figure skater Dorothy Hamill.
- "The Instant Rewards Program", focusing on benefits of exercise.
- "The Myths of Teenage Depression", how to get the help you need.
- "Soundoff!" sharing techniques to get depressed teens to open up and talk.

The Contents lists regular features:

Up Front, Viewpoint, Headlines, Research, Industry, We Read You, and more.

You can:

- Read this issue at the NAMIH Library.
- Subscribe for \$19.95 a year. Mail to:  
*esperanza* P. O. Box 59 Buffalo NY 14205.
- Visit their Web at: [www.hopetocope.com](http://www.hopetocope.com) .



## **May Events Calendar**

All NAMI Huntsville Meetings are held in  
The United Way Building  
701 Andrew Jackson Way, Huntsville,  
Unless otherwise announced.

### **Wed & Thurs, April 30 – May 1**

8:00am – Rummage Sale Work Days



### **Fri & Sat, May 2 – 3**

**NAMIH RUMMAGE SALE**  
**Young Nak Presbyterian Church**  
**7904 S. Whitesburg Drive**

### **Tuesday, May 6**

7:00pm – Support Group  
Facilitator: Cletus Harper

### **Tuesday, May 20**

6:00pm – Board Meeting  
7:00pm – Ed Program  
Topic: Panel Discussion  
Mental Health Center Services

### **Monday, May 26**

Memorial Day  
Office Closed

### **Tuesday, June 3**

7:00pm - Support Group  
Facilitator: Ruth Karr

### **Tuesday, June 17**

6:00pm – Board Meeting  
7:00pm – Education Program

### **Every Thursday**

6:00pm - Bipolar DBSA\* Support Group  
In the United Way Bldg.

Contact: David Hepler – 256.539.1411  
\*Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance affiliate

*Open Your Mind*



*Mental illnesses  
are brain disorders*



## Mind Matters

-Ruth Karr

In *Newsweek*, April 28 issue, David Noon reports in "Health Matters" on *Doctors Who Kill Themselves*. His report is mainly based on a study by Dr. Charles Reynolds, psychiatry professor, University of Pittsburg Medical School who will appear in May in a PBS documentary,

"Struggling with Silence". Reynolds wrote a 2003 article in *The Journal of The American Medical Association (JAMA)* that the rate of **depression** over the lifetime is about the same among physicians as in the general population, about 12 %, of male doctors' **suicide rate** is 1.4 times higher than in the general population; among female physicians, depression rate is double and **suicide rate** is 2.3 higher than in general.

Why these disparities? Millions of Americans seek treatment for this common mental illness, managing it with medication and/or therapy. Doctors are less likely to do so because they think they would lose respect, referrals, even their license to practice medicine. After all, *physicians are supposed to be the strong ones who care for the sick, not the sick ones needing care themselves*. Dr. Reynolds says "Undiagnosed depression is the culprit." Dr. Robert Lehmborg, in the PBS film speaks personally: "I did not want it to go into my medical records that I had been treated for depression. But once I got treatment, I realized how foolish I was."

But why the increased suicide rate, or risk thereof? In part, because doctors have access to lethal drugs and know how to use them to commit suicide. Substance abuse is another high risk factor. But two ways to address this dark issue are underway: The goal of the PBS film, the work of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) is to raise awareness. AFSP Medical Director Dr. Paula Clayton, says "If we teach doctors to recognize depression in themselves, they can recognize depression in their patients and help them as well". Dr. Reynolds says medical schools nationwide have launched programs that guarantees students who seek help for depression will not have the diagnosis appear in their records. Since depression often starts in early adulthood, treatment should cut down on the suicidal risk factors..."Get help, get well, stay well", he says. And so this part of the news is something to celebrate during Mental Health Month.

## NEW in the LIBRARY

***My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey.* by: Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor**

Reviewed By D. D. Trent

The popular belief is that only those affected by commonly termed mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, Bi-Polar Disorder, and autism are stigmatized by Western society because of their suffering. This is not always the case, however, as neuroanatomist Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor illustrates in her book "My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey".

Taylor's book is a true and inspirational account of one of the country's youngest and most prominent scientist's recovery from a severe stroke caused by a hemorrhage in the left hemisphere of her brain. In her pre-stroke days, Dr. Taylor was what our society considers to be a prime example of what an American citizen should be.

She was able to pursue her passion researching schizophrenia at Harvard University. She then went on to work at the Harvard Medical School of Psychiatry and was the youngest member to serve on the NAMI Board of Directors.



When the stroke hit, Taylor was stripped of all of the mechanical skills associated with the left side of her brain. She could no longer reason, write, count, speak, or make association with objects in the external world. Since no damage had occurred in her right hemisphere, she was left with only the functions of this side, a state of eternal bliss and feeling of being at one with the universe.

During the process of her recovery, Taylor came to realize first hand what the subjects she had been studying prior to her stroke encountered on a daily basis. In public she was often stared at, made fun of, or just intentionally avoided. She found this happening when she needed compassion and connection with the world the most.

*My Stroke of Insight* is an essential read for anyone who has undergone a mental, emotional, or spiritual crisis. Taylor assures us that just because we are wounded doesn't mean we are stupid or crazy, as our society would have us believe through its obsession with "normality" and functionalism. Her insight is convincing that the process of recovery can be a positive experience full of self discovery.

## We just finished our Family to Family class

by Dr. Pippa Abston, M.D. and Mike Gallaher, Co-teachers

We just finished our Family to Family (F2F) class, with 17 graduates. Course evaluations were uniformly positive, and participants were very pleased with the quality of information they received, as well as with the format of the course. We enjoyed teaching the class and appreciated the enthusiasm and participation of class members, especially in Class 11 when we talked about advocacy. We did an advocacy exercise where the class generated a number of wonderful advocacy proposals, many of which we hope to put into practice in upcoming months.



### Join NAMI Huntsville

Become a partner. Help NAMIH realize our goals to support, educate and advocate on behalf of individuals with mental illness and their families.

#### MEMBERSHIP FORM

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

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\$20 individual       \$25 family

New     Renewal     Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Mail check to: NAMIH, 701 Andrew Jackson Way  
Huntsville, AL 35801

## G R A S S R O O T S

### Official Newsletter of NAMI Huntsville

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Submit to: [hsvnami@hiwaay.net](mailto:hsvnami@hiwaay.net)

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