

NAMI Schenectady E-News

April 1, 2020 Edition

Acting Editor*: Cynthia Seacord Send address changes, requests to discontinue and comments to: namischenectady@gmail.com
or contact temporary acting editor at 518-374-8071 (home #)

*** Please NOTE: We need one or two members to take on the editorship of this newsletter!**

Support Group Meetings

Family support groups that have been meeting at Ellis Hospital (Wednesdays at 6 pm) and at CDPC (Tuesdays at 5 pm) are cancelled for the foreseeable future. We will let you know if and when we are able to offer a remote support group. In the meanwhile, we refer you to the Temporary Helpline from NAMI NYS and the Surge Mental Health Line announced by Governor Cuomo (see ad on this page). This newsletter contains a great deal of what we hope will be helpful reading as we all cope with COVID-19.

Programs and Board Meetings

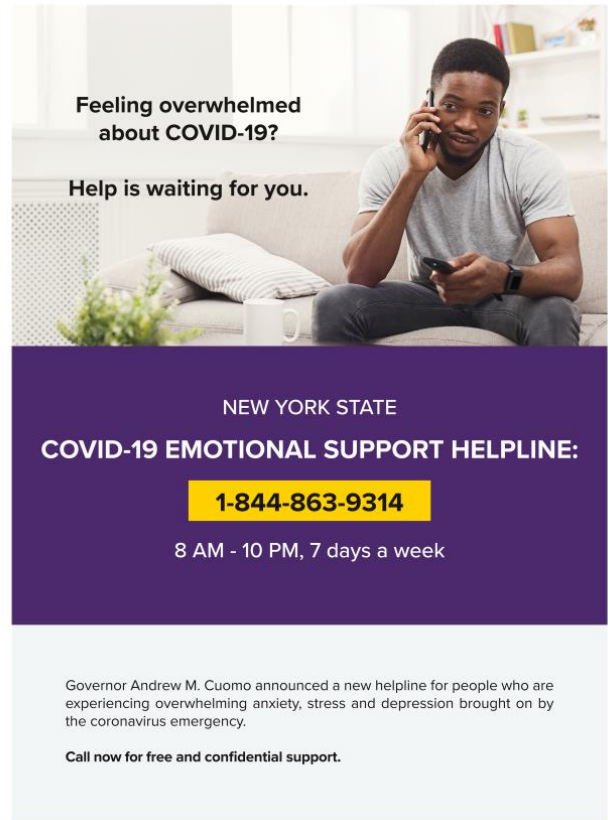
Obviously our board meetings for March and April have been cancelled. We have several topic meetings planned but have not been able, to date, to secure meeting spaces, and so we will have to wait it out like everyone else until we win this battle with COVID-19 and things get back to "normal." We will announce them as soon as we can on our website and via e-mail.

Art Collins Steps Up to the Plate

At our last board meeting prior to Legislative Day, Art Collins of our board of directors volunteered to take over the role of secretary necessitated by the resignation of Roy Neville from the board. We thank him for offering to complete Roy's term as secretary. We are still looking for a member willing to complete Roy's term on our board. If you are interested, write to the board at our g-mail address (above), and include "I want to be on the board" in the subject heading. Not on e-mail? Call the editor at the number in our heading.

Take Good Care of Yourself! Things to Remember that Promote Physical and Mental Well-Being:

- Eat a Healthy Diet
- Sleep at least 8 hours a night
- Keep a consistent sleep schedule
- Get a minimum of 10-15 minutes of sunshine daily
- Drink water!
- Practice deep breathing
- Work on managing stress



Feeling overwhelmed about COVID-19?

Help is waiting for you.

NEW YORK STATE
COVID-19 EMOTIONAL SUPPORT HELPLINE:
1-844-863-9314
8 AM - 10 PM, 7 days a week

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced a new helpline for people who are experiencing overwhelming anxiety, stress and depression brought on by the coronavirus emergency.

Call now for free and confidential support.



NAMI-NYS Offers COVID-19 Information and a Helpline

NAMI has collected and placed on its website all sorts of helpful information related to COVID-19. The link to this information is: <http://bit.ly/NAMINYCOVID19>. NAMI-NYS assures us that they will continue to update these resources as new information is posted. In addition, this page features relevant updates and changes to the various NAMI-NYS Affiliates' current operations.

For further support you can call NAMI-NYS's temporary Helpline number (518)-248-7635. Christine Rickeman, NAMI-NYS Helpline Coordinator, will be available weekdays from 8:00am-4:30pm.

Legislative Day March 3, 2020 in Albany

by the Editor

NAMI Schenectady made an impressive showing at Legislative Day with Glenn Raymus, Art Collins, Cindy Sood, Bob Corliss, Patty Costa, Roy Neville and Cynthia Seacord attending. NAMI NYS set up meetings for our group with three of the legislators serving our region. Senators Tedisco and Amedore, and Assemblyman Phil Steck. Unfortunately, all were either tied up with matters in their respective chambers or had too many appointments that day. Yet, we were able to meet with their staff to advocate for more funding for state services that have helped our folks, and use our personal stories to illustrate the value and need for the various agenda items we were advocating for. Top on our list were bills that address serious problems, Nicole's Law (suicide prevention) and the HALT Bill (eliminating solitary confinement especially for those with mental illness). Of course, Legislative Day took place prior to learning the seriousness of the COVID-19 outbreak. It is a game changer with respect to the budget that ultimately emerges from this 2020 session. We are no longer dealing with the budget deficit that influenced Governor Cuomo's original budget proposal. Due to the economic ramifications of dealing with the pandemic, the state faces a huge projected revenue loss. It remains to be seen what sort of budget comes out of Albany; for certain it is not going to be pretty and it will impact everyone. And it is still not clear whether federal assistance is forthcoming to address the state's revenue loss because of the economic impact of the virus. As we all deal with the COVID-19 crisis, we will have to stay calm, wait and see how this story unfolds.



"Bringing It Home" at the Capitol

A group of NAMI members from all over the state met in the Capitol's War Room at noon on Legislative Day to plead with Governor Cuomo and the Legislature to increase mental health housing program funding. Their group chant really resounded in this room! Can you pick out Cynthia, Cindy, Art and Glenn in this photo?

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Help from Schenectady's Newspaper

On Friday, March 27, 2020 the **Daily Gazette** published a page of useful information, ranging from advice on how to prevent the contraction of COVID-19, to helplines and hotlines to access assistance. We hope that the information we've selected to share will prove helpful to you.

Helping Hands and Hotlines:

- NYS Coronavirus Hotline (for general questions) 1-888-364-3065
- Schenectady County Public Health Services, Communicable Disease Dept. 518-386-2824, option #4, Monday-Friday 8:30-4:30. After hours: 518-437-7878
- For Non-medical issues only, the Schenectady County COVID-19 Emergency Response Coalition can be reached at 518-621-3536. It helps ensure that those in quarantine or isolation, especially the high-risk elderly, get basic needs, such as groceries and basic supplies. **NOTE the supplies are limited so use this contact in an emergency situation only.**
- NY Connects for seniors: 518-382-8481
- Schenectady County COVID-19 help website www.schenectadycounty.com/covid19help

Resources:

- NYS Health Department – Novel Coronavirus (COVID-10) website: www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/
- CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncv/faq.html#prevention for Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- CDC Prevention and treatment of COVID-19: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention-treatment.html
- Schenectady County Department of Health: www.schenectadycounty.com/publichealth
- Montgomery County Public Health: 518-853-3531 or www.co.montgomery.ny.us/publichealth
- Albany Co. Dept. of Health, 518-447-4580 or www.albanycounty.com/departments/health

LOTS MORE INFORMATION – KEEP ON READING!

Helpful Advice from NYS Office of Mental Health

The following guide is adapted from a 3/16/2020 Bulletin from the NYS Office of Mental Health. It is loaded with tips to help us take good care during the COVID-19 crisis.

We can all reduce our anxiety by reducing risk.

We should practice good hygiene, and by now we should have worked out a plan for dealing with the disruption of our regular routine, such as setting up remote work and making alternative childcare arrangements. Making a plan helps you reduce your anxiety by taking charge of the things you can control.

It is a good idea to manage how and from whom you are getting your information, especially by choosing reliable sources. Getting regular, factual information is important, however, continuously scrolling through social media or watching the news all day can increase anxiety. A better idea is to pick a few trusted news outlets, for example, the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), or World Health Organization – and check your news sources once or twice a day for updates.

*Anxiety is a normal response to a stressful situation and is designed to provide us with ways to adapt to many situations, but when one faces ever-mounting uncertainty, an anxiety spiral can develop that no longer helps you. **It is important to monitor ones stress level, and discern between typical and atypical stress, and get help if you need it.** Typical stress reactions may include: difficulty concentrating; irritability and anger; fatigue; stomachache; and, difficulty sleeping. Atypical stress may include a persistent and/or excessive worry that doesn't subside, and interferes with your carrying out your daily tasks.*



OMH suggest that you **seek immediate help** If you experience significant changes in your energy level, your eating or sleeping patterns, or have difficulty concentrating, or suffer from prolonged and overwhelming worry and a sense of hopelessness, or thoughts of self-injury or suicide. **GET HELP at: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or text Got5 to 741741.**

All of us can benefit from good self-care, including exercise, eating healthy foods, and getting adequate sleep. We can try to spend time outside, while avoiding staying up late to watch the news. We can access via telephone or social media/Internet different kinds of support networks such as family, friends, colleagues, faith-based communities, and organizations we belong to that can strengthen our sense of connection.

We can channel our anxiety by performing meaningful tasks and roles within our support networks. When we help others and give them support, these activities, however small, benefit us as well.



It's good to give our minds a break. We need to find or create spaces that are not focused on COVID-19. We can start a social media thread about other topics, talk with friends and family about other topics, read or watch favorite TV shows or movies. Stay optimistic by savoring small positive moments, doing positive things like writing in a gratitude journal, and sharing with others moments during your day that were enjoyable. Mindfulness tools, such as grounding exercises, sensory modulation, and deep breathing may be useful. Enjoy music, yoga, playing an instrument or do crafts or art. (cont'd on page 4)



Helpful Advice from NYS OMH (cont'd)

For Individuals Receiving Mental Health Services

should work with a mental health provider on setting up a coping plan. Identify helpful coping skills to practice daily. At the same time, identify those harmful behaviors you struggle with when stressed that are harmful to you (food, drugs, etc.) so that you will choose alternative de-stressors, such as music, walking outside, reframing your thoughts, and connecting with others who are helpful, when you are feeling anxious. Focus especially on preparing ahead for moments of heightened anxiety in order to better cope, should these moments arise. Ask your provider about practical skills that you can rehearse for managing anxiety.

Be sure to figure out with your provider alternative options, should your routine services get disrupted. For example, people may be able to use tele-medical-mental health services, and get assistance in procuring prescriptions. Seek positive peer supports. Connect with others who understand your experiences and can assist in problem-solving. If you experience feelings of isolation, get connected with online peer supports or peer hotlines.

For Parents, especially those with children already experiencing anxiety disorders, it's important to think about and rehearse conversations about COVID-19. Children get their cues from those who take care of them as to how anxious they need to be about a topic. There are resources and media in your reach to help you. Be open with your children about the situation, because avoiding the topic or giving blanket reassurances is more likely to feed your child's fears. Most kids elementary-aged and up have heard about COVID-19. If your child brings up the topic, let him or her know you are glad to discuss this with them. This will increase the likelihood they will not hesitate to come to you with further concerns. Give no more information than is requested, and check to make sure they understood your response by asking them to repeat back what they heard. Let them know you are open to more questions. Reassure your child that it is normal to feel scared or anxious.

Help your school-aged child and adolescent set boundaries on their information flow in much the same way you are limiting your own. Help them identify factual sources of information and give them set times to check in with you about what they're hearing. Encourage them to use their skills to question the messages they are hearing especially when they conflict. You may want to limit media exposure, or watch TV or read media *with* your child, so that you can be available to interpret and explain what they are exposed to.



Keeping routines as intact as possible will help reduce anxiety, especially mealtimes and bedtimes. Since many children are being kept home from school, and may be getting schoolwork to do at home, it's vital to set up a structure. You can work with each child to come up with a daily schedule, into which they can fit in school work, an outdoor activity, lunch, and other activities, such as time to practice musical instruments, do art work, read, watch TV and do homework.

Explore with your child the many ways that he or she can maintain contact with persons such as grandparents that they are separated from. If you have media, encourage use of the telephone or a video call, or a child can send letters and postcards to friends and family.



Physical activity and time outside when and wherever possible are helpful in reducing anxiety and in building resilience. Learn about and teach your child anxiety reduction skills, such as purposeful breathing, guided imagery, and distraction, that will help them in any situation. (continued on page 5)

Helpful Advice from NYS OMH (cont'd)

For Caregivers of Elderly Individuals: Help your family member maintain social connections. As the elderly have been told to isolate as much as possible, this aloneness may take a toll on physical and mental health. Provide technological solutions that will help family and friends stay connected to their elders. Caregivers can set up a group of people to check in on a rotating basis so that the individual feels the support of a network.

Even if isolated, the older individual should be encouraged to stay as active as possible, for both their physical and psychological well-being. Encourage the individual to help others, such as calling others to check in on them, or entertaining grandkids on FaceTime. It's important for people who are isolated to feel they have a purpose; it can reduce their anxiety.



You can help relieve someone's anxiety by doing such things as volunteering to order their groceries online or offering to walk the individual's dog(s). You can help by creating a list of reliable resources of information and updates on COVID-19 that the individual can use.

As a caregiver, you also need to practice good self-care, and be gentle with yourself, because caregiving, while demanding, yet rewarding role at the best of times, during a time of heightened concern is particularly stressful. Caregivers should try to find a ways to take small breaks, rotate responsibilities with others, and practice their own mental health strategies.

Truly caring people know they have to take care of themselves first.

Marty Rubin

Regional Research Team Aims to Improve Mental Health Care System Decision Making

By Sean Roohan and Neil Fontecchio

Dr. James Boswell from the University at Albany and one of our members submitted this article, and has offered to speak to our affiliate about this research when social distancing is at an end later this year.

Outcome research in mental health care has often focused on the relative effectiveness of treatment methods and techniques. Less attention has been devoted to the role of the provider in treatment outcome and quality of care. According to current practices, provider assignment often occurs in a somewhat random manner. It is not unusual in many treatment settings to assign providers (e.g., therapists) based on 'first available appointment' or other methods which are not tailored to the needs of the patient.

Supported by funding from the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI; <https://www.pcori.org/>), our research team has been devoted to making the provider assignment process less random and more patient-centered. The current project has been directed by principal investigators at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (Dr. Michael Constantino), the University at Albany (Dr. James Boswell), and Outcome Referrals, Inc. (Dr. David Kraus). An Advisory Board (comprised of patients, advocates – including NAMI members, mental health researchers, and providers) was convened to assist in the design and implementation of the project. Specifically, the randomized controlled trial set out to test a new approach to decision making in mental health care. The following is a description of the study and some of its primary results.

Based on patient-reported outcomes assessed by brief questionnaires asking patients (or caretakers) to rate symptoms and functioning over time while engaged in treatment, our previous research documented that providers show a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in their practices. For example, a clinician may be consistently above average in effectiveness treating individuals who display mania. The same clinician may be less effective when treating patients who display a high risk of suicide. Importantly, providers' self-identified expertise may not be a reliable predictor of such provider outcomes. Given these limits of provider self-reported expertise, objectively measured therapist strengths and weaknesses can have important implications in clinical practice.

(Decision Making continued) For example, if evidence (based on outcome information from patients) indicates that Dr. Jones is effective with patients who display mania and substance use, the next person who arrives at the clinic with a similar profile could be assigned to Dr. Jones. Such an approach would adhere to research evidence on therapist differences, and would be faithful to the desires and needs of individual patients. Throughout the course of our work, we have been concerned with the degree to which our established methods of assigning patients to therapists reflect findings regarding therapist differences.

For the present project in particular, we have been working with a network of community mental health centers in the Cleveland, OH area – Psychological and Behavioral Consultants (with project collaborators Dr. Tom Swales and Dr. Don Sykes). The first part of the project involved collecting network clinicians’ patient-reported outcomes, in order to determine a list of clinicians who were above or below average in treating 12 different (as well as combinations of) presenting problem domains (depression, anxiety, sleep, psychosis, mania, sexual functioning, interpersonal functioning, work functioning, suicidality, quality of life, substance use, and violence).

Once clinician outcome “track records” were established, new, routinely presenting patients were consented and randomized to one of two study conditions: (1) a scientific match condition where a given patient’s assignment to a clinician was based on a clinician having demonstrated a track record of effectiveness in the patient’s primary area(s) of concern; or (2) assignment to a clinician “as usual” (typically non-personalized and largely based on clinician calendar openings). All clinicians then delivered treatment as they usually would; that is, our study solely tested the effect of matching at the outset of MHC. We also collected some additional data about the patients and clinicians, and then tracked patient treatment outcomes in both groups across their naturalistically delivered therapy.

As we predicted, patients who were assigned to scientifically well-match clinicians had significantly better outcomes than patients assigned as usual. In fact, being matched to a personally good-fitting clinician essentially doubled the effectiveness of usual care. We also tested whether or not a scientific match was particularly important for certain subgroups of clients. As predicted, we found that the positive effect of the match (relative to assignment as usual) was more

pronounced for patients who identified as racial/ethnic minorities and who had more severe problems at the start of treatment.

The results of our study establish an evidence-based method of matching patients with therapists. This modest shift in a system’s routine procedures can improve outcomes and quality of care. Other findings from this PCORI-funded work, along with research supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, show that mental health patients value the use of information about a clinician’s track record when patient assignments are made, and that such a procedure improves mental health care.

Ideas For Fighting Cabin Fever, from MENTOR published electronically by Capital EPA of Albany.

1. **Invest in “Me Time”:** have yourself an at-home Spa Day, read your favorite book, engage in your favorite activities and hobbies that have been on the back burner
2. **Online Workout:** several fitness and yoga studios are streaming live classes online; there are also many workouts you can access online to do at any time
3. **Practice Mindfulness:** spend time in the present moment by using adult coloring books, listen to a guided meditation from the internet, focus on your 5 senses as you sip your morning coffee
4. **Catch Up with Family and Friends:** technology allows us to stay connected when we can’t be together. Have a video chat party with the ones you love!
5. **Get Outside:** utilize any outdoor space you have, take a walk (following social distancing recommendations!), plant a garden or window box
6. **Cook Something New:** now is the time to try out that recipe you’ve never had time for! Hit the internet or go through old family cookbooks for inspiration
7. **Redecorate, Rearrange:** Put some pizzazz in your space! Changing the arrangement of furniture or adding some decorations can make your home feel like a new space
8. **Dress Up to Feel Good:** instead of staying in pajamas for weeks, pick one day a week to get yourself dressed and ready to go out as you normally would to help fight off depression
9. **Learn about things that interest you:** the internet has so much information about...everything! Research things you’ve always been curious about like astrology, fainting goats, or laughter yoga
10. **Start a Gratitude Journal:** each morning, start your day off by writing down three things you are grateful for. A fresh, positive perspective can change the outlook of your whole day!

Mark your calendars: May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Do you have topics you'd like to see covered in our newsletter for May? Recommendations are encouraged!!!

Check out: C.R.E.A.T.E. Community Studios operating out of Saratoga and Schenectady. Even though their art studios are closed due to social distancing, they have a number of at-home options for those of you who find art to be a stress reducer. Check out their website for more information <https://createcommunitystudios.org>

NAMI SCHENECTADY WANT ADS

(The need is still there! Many of these jobs are ones you can perform at home!)

respond at: namischenectady@gmail.com

WE NEED YOU TO HELP US DO THE VITAL WORK THAT MAKES NAMI WORK!

- Two members are needed to take over production of our *E-News*. We have one volunteer. Contact us if you want to become our 2nd co-editor. Will train.
- Reporters are needed for our newsletter. Review a book or movie, advocate, or share recovery and wellness-related tips.
- A co-webmaster is needed for our website, namischenectady.org. Put your technology know-how to work today.
- Create and maintain a Facebook account for our affiliate.
- People are needed to serve on committees (example: nominating, program planning, finance) **and we need to fill one board vacancy with term running through 2020!!**
- Drivers for events, especially peer activities.
- NAMI Family to Family class graduates to become certified Family to Family teachers so we can offer more classes (ask us how!).



Are you a peer, or a caregiver who wants to know more about mental illness and treatment? Write us if you're interested in learning about NAMI's Signature Education/Self-help courses. They will resume in 2020 as soon as the "all's clear" signal is given! We can get you information on Family to Family (for family and friends) and Peer to Peer (for persons living in recovery.) and if you want to take the course, we will contact you when classes resume.



Another old adage comes to mind..."it's always darkest just before the dawn." This is actually what the "April Showers" saying is getting at: i.e., dark gloomy days make the way for those beautiful days to come. It's tough to stay positive during April in the best of times. Our brains tend to require more thinking to process the negative, and we can get stuck there when it's rainy. Then, you add on top of it isolation and the mostly alarming information we are hearing during this pandemic.

What we need to do is do all we can to **accentuate the positive**. As said elsewhere in this newsletter, we can be catching up on rest, learning something new, breathing new life into a neglected hobby or calling up and chatting with an old friend. We don't know when this all will end, but we should grab onto hope, and plan for the time when we can be together and enjoy each other's company again. I'm planning a party. What's YOUR plan?

We're going to get through this! STAY WELL!

JOIN NAMI SCHENECTADY

Membership in NAMI Schenectady also makes you a member in
NAMI New York State and national NAMI

To join choose your annual membership dues type(x) below and
complete form to accompany your check: ___individual \$40
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Healthy Minds = Healthy Communities

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