



WELCOME BACK, COMMUNITY MEMBERS!

As a way to create a more inclusive community, the UMass Psychotic Disorders Clinical and Research Program has developed the Central Massachusetts Psychosis Network to build knowledge, develop skills, and share resources that may be useful to those who are interested in psychosis, schizophrenia and severe mental illness. We hope the network will serve as a catalyst to promote collaboration among all of the Central Massachusetts community and ultimately to improve the clinical care and quality of life for those living with psychotic disorders and severe mental illness.

As a member of this network, you will receive up to date information such as patient resources, upcoming events, inspiring stories, and research updates. If you know of anyone who is interested in joining this network, please let us know; we will be happy to add them to the group.

Welcome back to the Central Massachusetts Psychosis Network!

THE COMMUNITY INTERVENTION PROGRAM-SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS (CIP-SMI)

Contributed by Eden Shaveet and Giuliana Zarrella

The UMass Psychotic Disorders Program has developed the Community Intervention Program – Severe Mental Illness (CIP-SMI) initiative with the mission of creating a more mindful Worcester by providing various supports and informational opportunities for those invested in the mental wellness of our communities. The CIP-SMI initiative is specifically committed to addressing the needs of those affected by a severe mental illness as this patient population faces a mortality rate that is two to four times higher than that of the general population – a discrepancy thought to be attributed in part to the population’s lack of access to wellness-based resources and opportunities to connect with their communities.

The goal of the initiative is to improve the lives and wellbeing of individuals living with SMI by inviting them to participate in three public intervention and education modules – Lifestyle as Medicine, Arts and Music, and Early Psychosis Intervention and Detection in College Students.



The Lifestyle as Medicine module will present an opportunity for individuals to establish healthy lifestyle changes via recovery and support-based discussions and activities with a focus on making healthy food choices and increasing physical activity.

The Arts and Music module will present an opportunity for individuals to harness and express their creative abilities and talents while offering a platform for social interaction via art therapy groups, music therapy groups, and Dual Diagnosis Theatre Dramatherapy.

The Early Psychosis Intervention and Detection in College Students module will present an opportunity for college students exhibiting early signs of SMI to increase their awareness of early intervention strategies, collaborate with their college campuses to improve access to early treatment options, and train as student peer specialists to improve the support available for fellow students exhibiting signs of SMI.

Each module intends to host different events throughout the upcoming year such as music/writing night, screening on college campuses, healthy living focus groups, and more. Over the summer, the initiative hosted both a paint night and a cooking demonstration. Each event was well-received and are intended to be repeated within the upcoming year.

All CIP-SMI events are free to attend and anyone can join. We welcome the opportunity to partner with interested individuals and organizations for this important initiative. Please contact us at mind@umassmed.edu for more information.

COMMUNITY EVENT: COOKING UP A TASTY SOLUTION

Contributed by Sindhu Kosuru

Eat zoodles, not noodles. Kevin, head chef of Roots Natural Foods Market explained. Chef Kevin’s hands danced over the stove as he shared about the benefits of eating zoodles (zucchini noodles) and meatballs, a healthier veggie-filled carb-free alternative to spaghetti and meatballs. Chef Kevin, who invited an attending individual diagnosed with SMI to be his sous chef for the day, came as part of a healthy living event to address a “triple jeopardy” risk of mental disorder, metabolic problems (such as obesity and diabetes), and substance use, which are common in patients with severe mental illness.

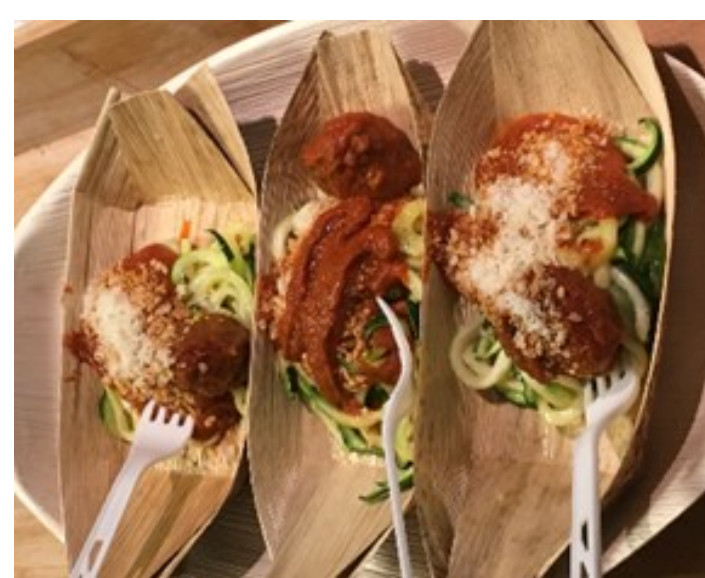
On June 13th, as part of the “Healthy Living” module within the CIP-SMI initiative, our program packed into the beautiful Tower Hill Botanical Garden in Boylston, MA with patients and staff from Community Healthlink to join a Cooking Demonstration event with Chef Kevin.

But before Kevin’s flavor-filled finale, patients were asked about the obstacles that prevent them from pursuing a healthier lifestyle.

Jennifer Parker, a UMass nutritionist, introduced MyPlate, the currently recommended nutrition guide, and then addressed some of their concerns by showcasing different quick simple and delicious healthy food recipes.

The event culminated with a stroll through the scenic botanical garden to encourage exercise into patients’ lifestyles. All participants praised the event and left feeling motivated and confident to change their eating habits. The CIP-SMI initiative is committed to promoting a sense of community for individuals living with SMI and are planning to continue hosting similar healthy living events in the upcoming year.

Please see a recap of the event and cooking presentation [here!](#)



INSPIRATIONAL STORY: NEVER LOSE HOPE

Contributed by Mona Polavarapu

A diagnosis of schizophrenia can often be worrisome for patients and family members as they encounter obstacles regarding treatment and lifestyle plans. It can be difficult to remain optimistic in the face of these challenges, but the Psychotic Disorders Research Program recently had the opportunity to interview one woman who did not let her son’s schizophrenia disorder diagnosis deter her.

When Suzanne Donahue initially learned that her son, Shaun, suffered from such an illness, she was devastated. She remembers being told by a nurse that there was no hope of recovery for her son. She also remembers vividly that during a psychotic episode, Shaun experienced a delusion that his uncle was drowning, causing him to jump out of a car and run across a two-lane highway.

However, Suzanne was determined to help her son in any way she could. After becoming a patient of Dr. Fan, the director of the Psychotic Disorders Research Program, Shaun exhibited remarkable improvements. He no longer needed to be hospitalized frequently, and he was able to have more structured daily life. He was even able to speak at a neuroscience forum for forty-five minutes, sharing his experience in living with a mental illness and answering questions, in front of a large group of doctors and scientists. Suzanne’s perseverance, along with medication treatment and other community support, helped her son begin his recovery. Now, Shaun is able to go to work regularly and explore his love for music by attending concerts. Although the road had some twists and turns, Suzanne’s refusal to give up hope helped Shaun embark on the journey to recovery.

“Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall”, citing a quote from Confucius, Dr. Fan believes the story of Suzanne and her son sends an inspiring message to others who have been diagnosed with a severe mental illness and their families: remain optimistic; never lose hope.



Pictured above: Dr. Xiaoduo Fan, Shaun Donahue, and Suzanne Donahue

RESEARCH STUDIES IN NEED OF VOLUNTEERS

The UMass Psychotic Disorders Research Program has several ongoing research studies that are still in need of volunteers. It is our patients and their stories that inspire the research that we do and drive us to apply the findings to patient care.

Research studies are located at **26 Queen Street, Worcester, MA 01610**. You will be compensated for your time. If you are interested in participating, please contact us by phone at **508-856-MIND (6463)** or by e-mail at mind@umassmed.edu.



The Memory Study

Have you been diagnosed with Schizophrenia or Schizoaffective disorder? Are you interested in helping us learn if a drug called Exenatide may improve your memory and thinking?

If so, you may be eligible to participate in a research study at UMass Medical School. Studies suggest that Exenatide (an FDA-approved drug) can reduce inflammation, which may protect the brain and improve memory and thinking in individuals with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder. Your participation in the study will last 24 weeks (6 months).



The Substance Use Study

Have you or someone you know been diagnosed with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder? Do you or that person also use alcohol, marijuana, or any other drugs?

If so, you or someone you know may be eligible to participate in a research study conducted at UMass Medical School. The purpose of this study is to see whether brexpiprazole, an investigational drug, can help reduce substance use in individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorders. Your participation in the study will last 12 weeks. You will be compensated for your time.