



WELCOME BACK, COMMUNITY MEMBERS !

Thank you for your continued support of the UMass MIND Clinical and Research Program. The Central Massachusetts Psychosis Network was developed to create a more inclusive community among patients, family members, mental health advocates, local organizations, and providers within the Greater Worcester Area. Over the years, we have shared groundbreaking research, local services, various events, and connected hundreds of community members. We hope that this network will continue to serve as a catalyst to promote collaboration within the Central Massachusetts community.

Dramatherapy for Individuals with a Dual-Diagnosis

by Kareem Hamada

Dramatherapy is a form of treatment that encourages spontaneity and creativity. It allows participants to share their stories, set goals, and solve problems. Through drama, the depth and breadth of inner experience can be actively explored, and interpersonal relationship skills can be enhanced. Participants can enjoy themselves on a journey of life-enhancing self-transformation in which they have the opportunity to work together under the guidance of a drama-therapist to map and share their stories with others in an effort to heal and affect their emotional well-being.

In collaboration with Lesley University, UMass MIND launched a pilot project to assess the efficacy of drama therapy for individuals with a dual-diagnosis (severe mental illness and substance use). Rather than having these individuals participate in the traditional “talk therapy”, the action and movement of dramatherapy may help them better experience reality and release emotions. In addition, dramatherapy may be used as a coping mechanism for those engaging in substances. The study will last for 10 weeks and participants will meet weekly to create a one-act drama related to issues relevant to their experiences and journeys with a dual-diagnosis. Participants will also have the opportunity to perform for the general Worcester community, redefining the public’s understanding of mental illness.

Would you like to learn more about this unique and exciting opportunity? Join us for our dramatherapy sessions and get to know others who share the same interests as you! For more information contact us at (508) 856-MIND (6463) or MIND@umassmed.edu.

Kareem Hamada is a clinical research intern of UMass MIND. He is also one of the program leaders of the UMass MIND Community Intervention Program.

A red promotional flyer for the 'Dual-Diagnosis Theater Research Project'. It features a logo for UMass MIND Clinical and Research Program at the top left, a stylized graphic of two theater masks (one smiling, one frowning) on the right, and text describing the project. The text includes: 'LIFE IS FULL OF DRAMA', 'Dual-Diagnosis Theater Research Project', 'What is Dramatherapy?', 'Our Program', and 'Interested in Learning More? Contact Us!'. Contact information is provided at the bottom: '+1 508-856-MIND (6463)' and 'MIND@umassmed.edu'. A small footer at the bottom right reads 'Approved UMass Medical School IRB IRB STUDY ID #: H00017897'.

Psychosis Screening and Education among College Students

By Mark Liu

With the prodromal and onset period oftentimes coinciding with adolescence and young adulthood, severe mental illness has impacted many American college students. However, given residential college's unique position as the academic, social, and residential epicenter of students, colleges are equipped to effectively combat this problem. In order to help further address this issue, the Early Detection and Intervention (EDI) module of the UMass MIND Community Intervention Program has been working hard to launch a screening program in participating colleges in the Worcester area.

This fall, with the help of Dr. Charles Morse, Associate Dean and Director of Counseling at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) and Dr. Brian Skehan of UMass Psychiatry Department, the EDI hopes to pilot this program starting from WPI. Planned as a two-day event, the pilot project will include seminars directed toward educating college students of early warning signs of severe mental illness, especially psychosis. Multiple studies have shown that the longer patients wait before seeking treatment when exhibiting prodromal symptoms of psychosis, the worse the course of the disease may be. Hence the key to effective management of psychosis across college students may be to catch and treat them early. By disseminating this information to the very environment that at-risk students spend most of their time around, the EDI hopes to create a more effective safety net that can catch those students who elude the best of their college counseling centers' efforts to help them.

As UMass and WPI partner through this event, it will pave the way for future initiatives that can directly establish a pipeline that sends at-risk students to the help they need at their college counseling centers. WPI is only one college out of many in the Worcester area. With the success of this pilot, the EDI hopes to implement these seminars across colleges, standardizing universities' abilities to catch and treat potential patients. Through education and screening, the EDI hopes to play its part in reducing the burden of severe mental illness on the Worcester community.

Mark Liu is a second year medical student at UMass Medical School. He also leads the Early Detection and Intervention module (EDI) of the UMass MIND Community Intervention Program.



UMass MIND members met with Dr. Charles Morse at WPI Student Development and Counseling Center. From Left to Right: Dr. Charles Morse (WPI), Amy Cheung (medical student), Tao Xu (intern), Kareem Hamada (intern), Danielle LaPenta (UMass MIND staff), Dr. Brian Skehan (UMass psychiatrist), Mark Liu (medical student).

Gordian Knot: A Poem

By William-Bernard Reid-Varley

They say your brain can bend to suit the day
And snap right back when stress has passed away—
Allostasis—constancy through change—
Is how we weather life's unwelcome pains

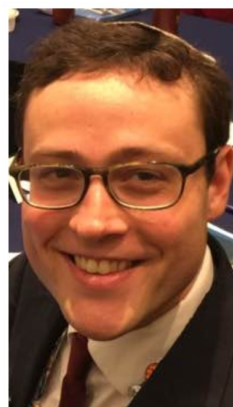
But if the strain's too great at once to bear,
Or it endures past all hope and prayer—

The pure productive process goes a-rye
My psyche sticks in hectic hyperdrive
And then “I don't care if I bleed” or die
A system failure does this not belie?

Oh, where is the intelligent design?
With each uppercut he undercut my mind
And bold caress my chemistry defined
So that my circuits all be mis-aligned
To call it molding I am so inclined
For now my mind's a putrid fuzz enshrined
Within a twisted black and bitter rind

Oh, if demented, with relief I'd sigh,
And in my blissful ignorance abide
But, a silhouette of sanity, I've plied
The cold and savage sea of tears I cried
In the solitary silence—naught beside—
Of the starless, moonless, mid-night of my mind

Description of Poem: This poem is an imagined internal conversation of a schizoaffective disorder, bipolar type patient with PTSD due to physical and sexual abuse wrestling with the effects of early abuse on her brain. At once full of energy yet tormented by memories, her past abuse, and the fear-conditioned state of her mind, the patient is experiencing a mixed mood episode, where she is emotionally “in pieces”. This is represented graphically with blocks of verse scattered on either side of the page.



Dr. Reid-Varley is a Psychiatry chief resident at UMass. He also leads the Arts and Music module of the UMass MIND Community Intervention Program. He has a deep appreciation and talent for poetry writing.

Ongoing Research Studies

- ◆ **The Refractory Symptom Study:** The purpose of this research is to see if a daily 80mg dose of telmisartan changes brain chemistry in individuals with schizophrenia who have not experienced a significant relief of symptoms from current medication as measured by MRI brain scans.
- ◆ **The Substance Use Study :** The purpose of this study is to see whether brexpiprazole, a recently FDA approved medication, can help reduce substance use in individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder.

All study visits take place at 26 Queen St, Worcester, MA. You will be compensated for your time. If you are interested and want more information, please call (508) 856-MIND (6463) or e-mail MIND@umassmed.edu.

The Central Massachusetts Psychosis Network aims to create a community space to build knowledge, develop skills, and share resources regarding psychosis, schizophrenia and severe mental illness. Please share with us your novel ideas, useful resources, upcoming events, research updates and inspiring stories. If you know of anyone who is interested in joining the network or if you prefer not to be part of the network, please let us know. You may reach us by phone at 508-856-MIND (6463) or by e-mail at mind@umassmed.edu. This network was developed by the UMass MIND Clinical and Research Program, which includes four major components: specialty clinical care, research, community outreach, and global initiatives. You can follow UMass MIND on: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)!

Editor for this issue of the newsletter: Tao Xu (clinical research intern, UMass MIND)