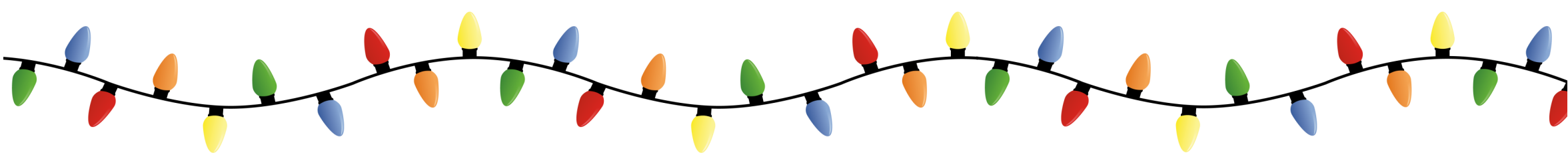


November-December 2018



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 regarding groundbreaking research, community organizations, upcoming events, local resources, and inspiring stories. If you would like to be featured in our future newsletters, do not hesitate to contact us. If you know of anyone who is interested in joining this network, please share our contact information with them or let us know; we will be happy to add them to the group.

Welcome back to the Central Massachusetts Psychosis Network!

And Happy Holidays!

The Role of a Physician in a Patient's Life: Reflection From a Medical Student

Contributed by Amy Cheung

Doctors use their clinical judgment to remedy illness and alleviate their patients' distress through patient education, medical prescriptions, and procedural practices. However, these skills and privileges developed through years of medical training are practiced in a limited setting. Though a physician's livelihood is to treat patients, patients live out their day-to-day lives immersed in their own professions, social networks, hobbies, etc. During these month-long gaps in between medical visits when lifestyle decisions and social interactions affect an individual's wellbeing, is there a way for us as clinicians to advocate for our patients' health?

Psychiatrists are in a unique position to work with vulnerable patient populations. People living with mental challenges face a multitude of problems including cognitive impairment, stigma, and loss of autonomy. Mental illnesses often arise early in life during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. A lack of intervention services as well as mental health advocacy during this critical time period can lead to profound long-term consequences. These individuals, especially those with severe mental illness (SMI) such as schizophrenia, may be unable to finish their education, and often find themselves isolated and misunderstood. In addition, substance use and poor healthy living practices leading to metabolic problems (e.g., obesity, diabetes, hypertension) would compromise their quality of life. To combat these obstacles, community efforts including ones coming from our own institution support recovery and help set an example for other organizations to establish resources that promote positive health practices.

One year ago, Dr. Xiaoduo Fan introduced me to the Community Intervention Program – Severe Mental Illness (CIP-SMI), a community initiative led by the UMass Psychotic Disorders Program. The three active modules including Lifestyle as Medicine, Arts & Music and Early Detection & Intervention use distinct approaches to help recovery for individuals with SMI residing in the greater Worcester area. While Lifestyle as Medicine and Arts and Music modules focus on self-care and self-expression, the Early Detection & Intervention module addresses a gap in both clinical services and peer support for individuals experiencing early psychotic symptoms. Our CIP-SMI team continues to grow with support from community partners along with a group of psychiatry residents, medical students, and undergraduate interns. So far, I've had the opportunity to:



Pictured, far left, is Amy Cheung, an MD/PhD student at UMass, at a previous cooking demonstration event

- Visit group homes to meet individuals with SMI and learn more about their daily living situation
- Help organize events like cooking demonstrations and paint nights to illustrate CIP's commitment to improving functional recovery
- Contribute to development of research proposals
- Co-author a publication about insomnia in an academic journal
- Attend a national conference to showcase CIP's efforts in lifestyle change
- Work with colleagues passionate about rebuilding self-confidence in individuals with SMI

On all of these different fronts, CIP-SMI aims to incorporate longitudinal strategies to better the overall health in our community. I hope that more and more patients are properly equipped with the knowledge and tools to make choices prioritizing their mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. Spending time to make a difference in the community leads to happier and healthier outcomes for everyone involved.

Therapy Through Theatre: A Community Production to Promote Healing

Contributed by William Bernard Reid-Varley

"The arts are a critical component of healthcare. Expressive art is a tool to explore, develop and practice creativity as a means to wellness." -Wellarts Association



It's showtime!

As part of the CIP-SMI initiative, the Arts and Music module presents an opportunity for individuals to harness and express their creative abilities and talents while offering a platform for social interaction via art therapy groups and music therapy groups. There are several events planned for this upcoming year, such as a paint night and poetry "slam", which give individuals the opportunity to express themselves through their artwork and their writing. They will be able to share and discuss their works and experiences of living with a severe mental illness.

Additionally, and most excitingly, we are working to create a new project that involves another form of expressive therapy- drama therapy. We envision a dual-diagnosis theatre in which individuals with both severe mental illness and substance-use disorders will write and perform a theatre play under the guidance of a drama therapist and members of drama departments at local universities. We are planning to hold our first small-scale pilot performance in late Spring, 2019 with the goal of creating a permanent structure for the crafting and performance of two full productions per year. In addition to serving as a therapeutic method for individuals to process and manage the issues they face as a result of their dual-diagnoses, the performances, which will be open to the public, will serve to raise awareness of the experiences faced by individuals with dual-diagnoses and decrease negative perceptions of this often-stigmatized population.

We welcome the opportunity to partner with interested individuals and organizations. We are always looking to maximize the number of high-quality projects we can hold and individuals whose lives we can positively impact. Please contact us at MIND@umassmed.edu for more information.

Resources: Combining Communities

Contributed by Giuliana Zarrella

Often times, receiving a diagnosis of any kind can be daunting. We all make the mistake of searching online for the answers to our symptoms in hopes of finding a not-so-scary explanation for what is happening to us. However, imagine being a young individual who, with no warning, begins seeing or hearing things that their peers cannot, begins having thoughts that they are being targeted by those around them, and having difficulty separating reality from fantasy. How would you feel?

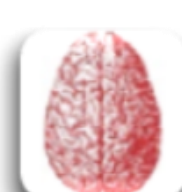
People experiencing a first episode psychosis may not fully understand what is happening to them. What they are experiencing can be disturbing and unfamiliar, possibly causing them more distress. Research has often shown that reducing the amount of time the individual is left untreated and having an opportunity to connect with their community yields a better response to treatment.

On November 20th, 2018, the Screening and Treatment of Early Psychosis (STEP) Clinic at Community Healthlink and the career development team from Genesis Club of Worcester, met to discuss how they can better serve young individuals in the community who are experiencing early signs of psychosis. STEP and Genesis Club have agreed to partner with one another to help young STEP clients through the Career Development Unit (CDU) at Genesis Club. The CDU oversees a large network of employment, education, and young adult services in the clubhouse. This includes supporting members to enter and maintain employment and education through in clubhouse and community supports. Sarah Brown, the Education & Young Adult Services Manager at Genesis Club, is excited about the partnership and had this to say, "The benefit of the STEP Clinic and Genesis Club partnership is the provision of complimentary services to young adults living with a serious mental health condition. While STEP provides essential clinical expertise, Genesis Club provides peer connections, support for employment and education, and other social determinants of health that support young people towards a successful future."

STEP and Genesis Club hope that this partnership will encourage a more involved approach between other early psychosis groups and community resources. It is the meaningful connections and partnerships like this that can give the most vulnerable individuals the care they truly deserve.



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 would like more information, please call (508) 856-MIND (6463) or e-mail MIND@umassmed.edu.

