

THE PRESENCE OF MIND

UMASS MIND CLINICAL AND RESEARCH PROGRAM
ANNUAL NEWSLETTER 2024



CLINICAL

ONE STEP UP: ENHANCING CURRENT EARLY PSYCHOSIS CARE

BY GREG BOURBEAU

The only university-affiliated, academically oriented specialty early psychosis clinic in Central Massachusetts, the UMass Screening and Treatment of Early Psychosis (STEP) Clinic is a partnership between Community Healthlink and UMass Mind. The purpose of the STEP Clinic is to provide patients and their families with education, support, and the highest-quality care. Following the national Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) model for early psychosis intervention, the STEP Clinic integrates mental health care, substance abuse treatment, and primary care in one location.

Current CSC clinics typically offer case management, psychotherapy, medication treatment, supported employment and education, and family therapy. However, the real-world application of CSC presents substantial obstacles such as patient involvement and retention. CSC clinics struggle to engage new patients, particularly since the pandemic, and to engage current patients for extended periods of time. According to studies, 30-70% of patients disengage from CSC within 6-12 months. There is a clear need for strategies to improve patient engagement in treatment.

UMass Mind and the STEP Clinic are excited to be a part of an NIH-funded study led by McLean that will evaluate the effect of an enhanced coordinated specialty care model called CSC 2.0 on patient engagement. This study will give crucial information about the feasibility and effectiveness of implementing an expanded CSC strategy across early psychosis clinics in Massachusetts. If successful, it could shape the future design and funding of CSC programs across the United States, serving as a model for improving early psychosis care on a larger scale. Collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) ensures that the findings are aligned with state strategic goals and have the potential to influence broader policy and practice in mental health care.

To refer a patient to the STEP Clinic and possible participation in the CSC 2.0 study, or to learn more about STEP's services, please call 508-856-mind (6463) or email mind@umassmed.edu.

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RESEARCH

KARXT: A NEW HOPE FOR SCHIZOPHRENIA TREATMENT

BY ALIX BARRY & ANNA NORIAN

Despite medication advancements, many people with schizophrenia continue to experience significant symptoms that interfere with their daily lives. This includes positive symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, and other disabling symptoms—negative symptoms like flat affect and social withdrawal; and cognitive symptoms such as poor memory and attention span. An estimated 33% of patients have an inadequate response to their antipsychotic medication, highlighting an important unmet need for novel medications. As a program that conducts cutting-edge research to better the lives of those with schizophrenia, UMass Mind is excited to participate in a multi-site clinical trial evaluating the efficacy of a novel treatment, KarXT, for inadequately controlled symptoms of schizophrenia.

Unlike current approved antipsychotics, which target dopamine receptors, KarXT has a different mechanism that may provide additional efficacy in reducing schizophrenia symptoms. KarXT combines xanomeline, which

activates muscarinic receptors instead of dopamine receptors, and trospium, which may mitigate the side effects of xanomeline.

This ongoing study, sponsored by Bristol-Myers Squibb, aims to evaluate the effectiveness of KarXT as an adjunctive treatment for the symptoms of schizophrenia. People who are diagnosed with schizophrenia and who already take antipsychotic medication, but still have symptoms, may be eligible to participate.

Participants will receive either KarXT or a placebo (which looks like KarXT but does not have active ingredients) for 6 weeks. This study is double-blind, meaning that neither the study team nor the participant know if they're taking KarXT or the placebo. Study activities will include assessing psychiatric symptoms and psychosocial functioning, and participants will be paid for their time.

KarXT has shown great promise in early studies. For many people who still experience significant schizophrenia symptoms and face challenges with their daily living, this study provides hope for a new schizophrenia treatment.

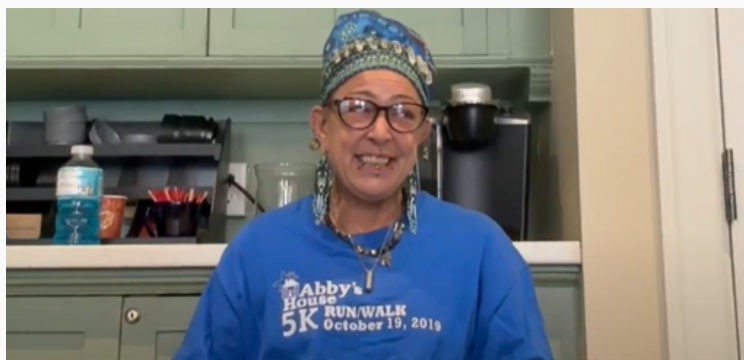
COMMUNITY

RECOVERY THROUGH COMMUNITY, MEDITATION, AND THE ARTS: AN INTERVIEW WITH JG BY ROSALEE YOUNG & KATIE LAMBERT

UMass Mind team members Rosalee and Katie recently met with JG, a community member who has been involved in our programs for many years, to learn more about her experiences as a person diagnosed with schizophrenia. She was more than willing to share her experiences, passionate about educating the public and supporting those beginning their own journey with this challenging mental condition.

"I've been in many hospitals, always trying to figure it out," said JG. "I found the right med finally." She explained that, despite some noticeable side effects, being treated with medication has helped her significantly. "I didn't hear any voices at all, except for one at night that scared me, but that's about it," JG said, noting that this was a major improvement for her.

Although as valuable as medication is in her recovery journey, this is not the only avenue JG utilizes to seek symptom relief; she added, "I do Tai Chi, I take art classes. I'm trying to get my GED and all I've got left is math." Tai Chi, she made clear, has been an especially rewarding emotional outlet. JG found guided tutorials for the martial art online, and it has now become an integral part of her daily routine. All she needs is her phone and the space she has in her bedroom, and the techniques from Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism, can be implemented into her lifestyle.

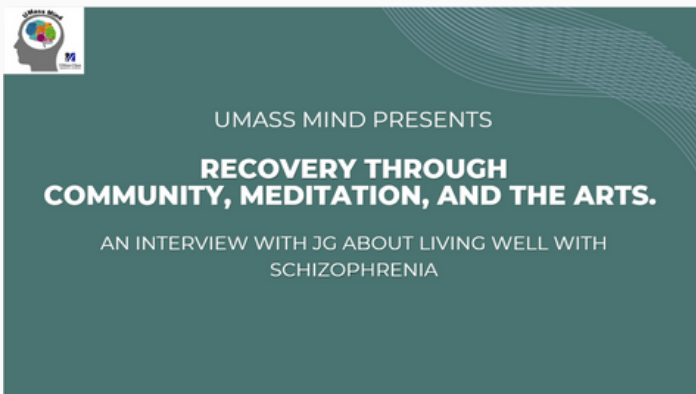


Visual art is a valuable coping strategy for JG as well. One of her goals is to improve her skills in this field. "I love art," said JG. She shared one of her recent works with us—a drawing of a wolf, made in charcoal. It only took a day's worth of work at a Worcester Art Museum class to complete the piece, with great attention to detail and artistry. "The [Worcester Art Museum] director calls me for classes, because I go to classes that other people don't. I'm waiting for the brochure to come out, because I can't wait to take classes again!"

**"TRY TO BE AROUND PEOPLE YOU LIKE,
PEOPLE YOU LIKE THAT CARE ABOUT YOU"**

When asked if she believed the general public understands schizophrenia correctly, JG responded, “Not really. They think it’s dangerous because you hear voices. Some people hear very mean voices, mine mumble a lot and do whispers. But if I was going to tell somebody about it, I’d tell them it’s not dangerous. It’s just a mental disorder [because] something [is] missing in your brain.”

JG has not been alone on her recovery journey. From the teachers and professors at Quinsigamond Community College helping her pass classes to earn her GED, to the counselors and doctors in her life, JG is highly thankful for the strong support system that she has. She had some related advice for those first receiving a similar mental diagnosis: “Try to be around people you like, people you like that care about you. That’s who you should only be around, people that care about you.” JG then added: “It’s never gonna go away, but you will be able to handle it. It will just be in the background, eventually.”



Click [HERE](#) to watch the full interview!

GLOBAL

AGING AND BRAIN HEALTH IN CHINA BY EMILY HUANG & NITYA VISHWANATH

On June 27, 2024, Dr. Xiaoduo Fan led a discussion on “Aging and Brain Health in China” with a group of senior Chinese healthcare executives at the 2024 China Europe International Business School’s (CEIBS) summer forum in Cambridge, MA. CEIBS is a renowned business school co-founded by the European Union and Shanghai Jiao Tong University in 1994, with one of the top-tier Executive MBA (EMBA) programs in Asia. This year’s summer forum focused on healthcare for the older population and multicultural communities.



As people get older, they experience changes in brain function, such as reduced attention span and memory difficulty. In addition to normal aging, some older adults experience dementia, which is a progressive decline in cognitive function that impacts daily functioning.

Alzheimer’s Disease, the most common type of dementia, is due to harmful proteins building up in the brain, which lead to the death of brain cells. Dementia is related to both mental and physical health but is often undertreated due to lack of access to quality care. This is particularly apparent in China, where 9-10 million people aged 65 years and older have dementia – about 25% of the entire population with dementia worldwide.

The executives from China shared observations and insights regarding the challenges of treating dementia, the role of mental health in older adults’ general wellbeing, and the importance of understanding cultural context.

In China, 70-80% of people diagnosed with dementia do not receive treatment, due to the poorly developed and costly care system. Most dementia patients rely on informal care at home, which is a heavy burden for the family.

These challenges are exacerbated by mental health concerns, which are often associated with aging and dementia. China, whose 1.4 billion population accounts for 18.5% of the world's population, has 250 million people with mental illness, and 16 million with serious mental illness such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorders. Most people don't receive treatment, as there are less than 30,000 psychiatrists and 5,000 therapists in China, with about 1.49 psychiatrists per 100,000 people.

The forum participants suggested that, in both the US and China, there needs to be a better integration of medication treatment with culturally appropriate complementary and alternative medicines, such as herbal medicines and meditation, for brain health in the older population. An increase in healthcare providers and resources is needed. In addition, an increased investment from the government and the private sector in research and new drug development is necessary.

CURRENT STUDIES: ACTIVELY RECRUITING!

Study #1: Metabolic Benefits of Lumateperone In Patients With Schizophrenia

The purpose of this study is to see whether determine whether adjunctive lumateperone (Caplyta®) might improve metabolic health in clozapine-treated individuals with schizophrenia. Lumateperone is an FDA-approved medication for adults with schizophrenia. Patients will receive lumateperone or placebo for 12 weeks and meet with the study team approximately 8 times. A variety of metabolic outcomes will be measured, including body fat distribution.

Study #2: KARXT as Adjunctive Treatment for Schizophrenia

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of KarXT, an oral medication, for the symptoms of schizophrenia. People who are diagnosed with schizophrenia and who already take antipsychotic medication, but still have symptoms, may be eligible to participate. Participants will receive either KarXT or a placebo (which looks like KarXT but does not have active ingredients) for 6 weeks, and meet with the study team approximately 8 times.

Our studies are conducted at 26 Queen Street, Worcester, MA 01610. You will be compensated for your time being involved in any study. If you are interested or would like more information about any of our studies, please call 508-856-MIND (6463) or email mind@umassmed.edu

FULL TIME CLINICAL RESEARCH ASSISTANT POSITION AVAILABLE!

The UMass Mind Clinical and Research Program is looking to hire highly motivated and ambitious individuals to run and manage the day-to-day operations of short term and multi-year research projects. The goal of our program is to develop innovative intervention strategies combining pharmacological and psychosocial approaches to treat clinical symptoms, medical co-morbidity and co-occurring substance use, and ultimately to improve the quality of life in patients with serious mental illness.

The Clinical Research Assistant will be responsible for performing delegated tasks and procedures involving human subjects in support of clinical research protocols. Qualifications include a bachelor's degree in a scientific or health care field or related experience and excellent organizational and interpersonal skills.

For more information, please email mind@umassmed.edu.