



June - July 2011

# NEWSLETTER

ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS

"NAMI SAN FERNANDO VALLEY"

A M I • 14545 SHERMAN CIRCLE • VAN NUYS, CA 91405 • 818-994-6747  
NON-PROFIT • ALL VOLUNTEER • PARTNERS WITH NAMI NATIONAL AND NAMI CALIF.  
www.namisanfernandovalley.org "SINCE 1975"

May I have the serenity to accept  
the things I cannot change —  
The courage to change the things I can —  
And the wisdom to know the difference.



Families Helping Families when loved ones suffer from mental illness brain disorders: (schizophrenia, clinical depression, bipolar disorder, schizo-affective disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, borderline personality disorder, etc)

## SFV Walk Committee On Shakey Ground; Eat Your Heart Out!

By Beth Arnold

NAMI SFV Walk Coordinator

Your 2011 NAMIWALKS committee has put together a fun evening to help raise funds for our affiliate while enjoying dinner at a favorite Southern California restaurant since 1954—Shakey's Pizza.

At the same, you will learn how you can help us reach our goal of forming 37 walk teams that will raise at least \$25,000 this year.

We will also raffle prizes, free to those present or \$10 for those who purchase a ticket for \$10. Come by for the evening or for just 20 to 30

### California Mental Health Services Funding Cuts Exceed \$587 Million

Since 2009, when the economic crisis went into full force, states have cumulatively cut \$1.8 billion in state general funding of mental health services, according to a review of budget documents from all 50 states and the District of Columbia by NAMI.

The largest cuts in terms of percentage of state general funds for mental health were found in Alaska, 35%, and South Carolina and Arizona, 23% each.

In dollar amounts, California led with cuts exceeding \$587 million, followed by New York, which reduced state funds by \$132 million, and Illinois, which cut more than \$108 million. The NAMI report projects even deeper cuts for 2012.

minutes and be sure to bring your copy of this article so that NAMI SFV receives 25% of your food purchases. Participants are expected to pay for their meal.

Thank you and we hope to see you there! Questions? Want to Help? Leave a message at 818 994 6747.

Location: Shakey's Pizza Restaurant  
9000 Balboa (Balboa&Nordhoff)  
Northridge, CA 91325  
818 360 2151  
Thursday, June 30  
5 p.m. — 8 p.m.

The substantial cuts have occurred as demand for public mental health services is increasing, driven by unemployment and loss of private insurance, the NAMI report notes.

Also, states may soon lose more than \$87 billion in additional federal Medicaid funds if the temporary increase in the federal match that was provided in the stimulus package ends as scheduled June 30, 2011.

This will mean losses to the states ranging from 22 million in North Dakota to nearly \$1.9 billion in California and \$1.4 billion in New York, according to the report. The two largest sources of state support for

## Our Upcoming Speakers

Third Wednesdays, 6:45p.m.  
14545 Sherman Circle, Van Nuys  
Questions Answered, Refreshments

June 15: Dr. Maria Longhitano, is staff psychiatrist at Hillview Mental Health Center and former staff psychiatrist at USC, CSUN student counseling centers, a consultation and liaison psychiatrist at Olive View Hospital. She is a graduate of the University of Catania, Italy.

July 20: James Coomes, Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health administrator of the new urgent care psychiatric facility in Sylmar next to Olive View Medical Center scheduled to open in August, and associate Susan Birman, are our speakers.

mental health services are Medicaid (46%) and state general funds (40%). In July 2010 a judge in Sacramento County, blocked the county from balancing the budget by cutting mental health services to thousands of individuals, warning that the cuts would cause "catastrophic harm" and violate the Americans With Disabilities Act, leading to potentially high litigation costs for the county.

The report makes five policy recommendations to states. Continued on Page 3

## NAMI San Fernando Valley June — July 2011 Calendar

### Van Nuys - June

14545 Sherman Circle

June 1, Wednesday, 7 p.m. Special Care and Share Group for spouses, brothers, sisters, adult children of persons with mental illness.

June 8 & 22 Wednesday, 7 p.m. Care and Share Support Group for families and friends of persons with mental illness.

June 15, Wednesday, 6:45 p.m. Welcome speaker Dr. Maria Longhitano staff psychiatrist at Hillview Mental Health Center.

### Santa Clarita - June

23501 Cinema Drive Room 200  
June 7 & 21, Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. Special Care and Share Group for families and friends of persons with mental illness.

### Reseda - June

18300 Roscoe Northridge Hospital Carole Pump Behavioral Health Services Entrance first floor. Park in lot on Etawanda across from hospital.

June 2 & 16 Thursday, 7 p.m. Care and Share Support Group for spouses, brothers, sisters, adult children of persons with mental illness.

June 21 Tuesday, 7 p.m. Special Care and Share Group for spouses, brothers, sisters, adult children of persons with mental illness.

### West Hills - June

22450 Sherman Way (west of Shoup) West Valley Christian School  
June 13 & 27, Monday, 7 p.m. Care and Share Support Group for families and friends of persons with mental illness.

### Van Nuys - July

14545 Sherman Circle

July 6, Wednesday, 7 p.m. Special Care and Share Group for spouses, brothers, sisters, adult children of persons with mental illness.

July 13 & 27 Wednesday, 7 p.m. Care and Share Support Group for families and friends of persons with mental illness.

July 20 Wednesday, 6:45 p.m. James Coomes and Susan Birman, LA DMH, speak on new urgent care psychiatric facility in Sylmar.

### Santa Clarita - July

23501 Cinema Drive Room 200  
July 5 & 19 Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. Special Care and Share Group for families and friends of persons with mental illness.

### Reseda - July

18300 Roscoe Northridge Hospital Carole Pump Behavioral Health Services Entrance first floor. Park in lot on Etawanda across from hospital.

July 7 & 21 Thursday, 7 p.m. Care and Share Support Group for families and friends of persons with mental illness.

July 19 Tuesday, 7 p.m. Special Care and Share Group for spouses, brothers, sisters, adult children of persons with mental illness.

### West Hills - July

22450 Sherman Way (west of Shoup) West Valley Christian School  
July 11 & 25 Monday, 7 p.m. Care and Share Support Group for families and friends of persons with mental illness.

## A Day In The Life Of A California Prison Psychiatrist Who Is Teaching Meditation To Prisoners

David Krassner, MD

Seven men sit before me, eyes closed, heads bowed and hands resting in their laps. They concentrate on their breathing, chests rising and falling, a few softly intoning the words "in" and "out" while others shift to find a comfortable position.

Calming music plays, overlaid with my own half mumbled encouragements. This might be mistaken for a community meditation group, were it not for the uniform white jumpsuits and individual steel mesh cages into which each man is padlocked.

This is the Administration Segregation Unit, or ASU, at the California Men's Colony State Prison in San Luis Obispo.

The Men's Colony, or CMC, one of 33 prisons in the Golden State, is considered by many experts to provide the best general health, mental health and dental care in any of California's institutions.

The seven men who meditate with me have all been accused or convicted of rules violations within the prison itself. Their punishment is time in the ASU or, as they call it, the "hole." They spend most of their time isolated in their cells.

They come out only for scheduled doctor visits, weekly individual exercise yard time, or the occasional group activity, such as mine.

Having allowed them a few minutes to focus on breathing, I now lead them through a series of stretches, tensing and relaxing our muscles, sometimes called progressive relaxation. My hope is to teach them skills they can use when they go back to their cells or when they are having trouble falling asleep.

Insomnia is ubiquitous in ASU. One key to relaxing the mind, I suggest to them, is relaxing the body. They nod in agreement.

My approach to teaching meditation to prisoners is based on lots of trial and error. Formerly a clinician in the California prison system's highest level of care, just below acute crisis care, I started out just evaluating inmates' medication regimens.

At most institutions these monthly contacts are the primary responsibility of the psychiatrist's practice. I am fortunate, however, in that CMC not only allows but encourages us to lead groups. After a year or so of solely evaluating medication regimens, I was struck

by the realization that many of my patients were suffering from the sorts of ailments that benefit from meditation. So I started a meditation group.

Originally we practiced several types, including walking meditation. This turned out not to be such a good idea when one of the inmates twisted his ankle in a pothole!

But the classes have proved successful. One reason for this success is how I run the groups.

My approach to treating these men has always been to regard them first as human beings, second as patients and only finally as inmates.

This approach seems to work fairly well. My attitude is not always shared by the custody staff, but we on the mental health services staff work alongside custody, and our relationship is usually collegial. Such a multi-disciplinary effort is essential given the CMC's nearly 1,800 mental health patients.

CMC is not unique. Thousands of inmates throughout California's penitentiaries are treated for mental health issues. California prisons are not unique, in that all other states in the Union offer such services to prisoners who require them.

What makes California unusual is the number of individuals who are incarcerated: almost 170,000. This huge population demands large mental health services departments in each institution. The demand increases almost daily, as more felons arrive at the gates; the supply fluctuates, but at present, there are not enough psychiatrists to fill the void.

Many psychiatrists do not want to work with inmates. This is understandable. As I scan the room where we are having our group meditation and look at each man, isolated, trying to learn some relaxation skills to help him deal with his stress,

I consider their commitment offenses. The list reads like a litany of FBI statistics: murder, battery, assault, kidnap, rape, manslaughter, robbery, carjacking, arson and torture.

But there is a counter balance. I've seen inmates care for baby birds and show surprising degrees of empathy to one another. There are rays of enlightenment.

We move on from progressive relaxation to guided imagery. I now ask them to imagine, in their mind's eye, a place. It can be any place—a forest, a desert, the ocean, a city park—any place they feel safe, any place they can "go" to escape the everyday horrors of prison life.

I then try to guide them around their safe place, hoping they will formulate in their own minds a unique vision of it. At times this can seem ironic, such when I ask them to "hear" the birds singing when the only actual sounds are heavy tier gates crashing open and closed, or when I ask them to "feel" the grass beneath their feet, when the floor beneath them is stone or tile.

Their bodies are literally trapped in cages, euphemistically called "individual treatment modules," but their minds can soar.

Most of the time, they make an effort at Meditating. Over time a winnowing process narrows the group to just the inmates who really want to be there.

These men now close their eyes and try to imagine some place better than where they are. In the process, some might learn mindfulness. Others might be surprised to find how challenging and enjoyable it is just to relax and focus on breathing or clearing the mind.

And I think they get something out of these groups. Not every man in every group benefits, but many do. As physicians, through we treat many and heal few, we hope we can offer comfort to most.

These men have been convicted of crimes, often heinous ones. But serving the prison term is the punishment, not how they are treated in prison.

They have a right to a minimum standard of health care, including mental health care. Unfortunately groups such as mine are rare in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

But for physicians who are committed to helping the underserved, this can be a rewarding challenge. Groups like mine go a long way toward treating the mental health needs of our inmates. My help, always, is to offer some measure of comfort.

Often, the group is comforting to me, as well. After endless committee meetings, lengthy treatment team meetings, and on-call duties, it is nice just sit and reflect. I usually learn as much from the inmates as they do from me.

We wind

Continued on Page 3

## California Mental Health Services Funding Cuts Exceed \$587 Million

Continued from Page 1

1. Protect state mental health funding and restore budgets, but tie funding to performance.
2. Maintain adequate numbers of inpatient beds for psychiatric treatment.
3. Invest in research on early detection and intervention in the treatment of serious mental illness for youths and adults.
4. Implement mental health screening and assessment programs.
5. Support programs designed to educate families, peers and the public about serious mental illness and how to respond to people living with mental illness.

The 22-page NAMI report, *State Mental Health Cuts: A National Crisis*, is available at [www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=state\\_budget\\_cuts\\_report](http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=state_budget_cuts_report).

—Psychiatric Services

## Discrimination In Salaries Of Behavioral Health Pros

The median annual salary of a direct-care worker in a 24-hour residential treatment center is \$23,000, compared with \$25,600 for an assistant manager at Burger King, according to data from the 2011 Behavioral Health Salary Survey by the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare. In addition, the survey provides evidence of "second-class status" within the health care industry of mental health and addictions treatment professionals. A licensed professional social worker earns \$45,300 in a mental health care agency and \$50,500 in a general medical facility. For registered nurses, working in an addictions treatment facility means taking a pay cut; their average salary is \$52,000, or nearly \$15,000 less than the national average of \$66,500 for all nurses. Chief behavioral medical officers earn from \$101,000 to \$150,000. Salary range for all other chief medical officers is \$184,000 to \$292,400. Just as persons with mental illnesses are routinely stigmatized, it appears mental health workers are treated differently within the health care community.



**About NAMI TRIBUTES.** . . When you make a Tribute donation to NAMI-SFV of \$5 or more (tax deductible), our Tribute Chair will send a lovely NARSAD Note Card to your designee with your message and an acknowledgment of your donation. Your Tribute will appear in this newsletter. Call 818-994-6747, press #, leave your number, ask that the Tribute Chair call you.

## California Prison Psychiatrist Teaching Inmates Meditation

Continued from Page 2

up our relaxation with a few minutes of silence, except for the music. I then invite them to return to the room, opening their eyes when they are ready.

As the custody officers escort the inmates from the room, shuffling, handcuffed, they all thank me, and I thank them for coming, praising them for their participation, offering my wish that they have benefited from their efforts. They nod in agreement.

So, while I can readily understand why many psychiatrists would not want to work in a prison setting, my own feeling of satisfaction is unalloyed.

Although I did not start out in corrections doing "forensic" psychiatry, as it is called, I expect to finish my career here.

Do I always love my job? Of course not. Is it hard to gear up for my group every week? Certainly. Would I stop doing it, though, if I could? Probably not. It helps me retain my humanity in a place often devoid of this quality.

## Housing Rights Of Persons With Mental Disabilities Are Protected

The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law has released the 2011 version of its popular booklet that explains how federal laws protect the housing rights of persons with mental or physical disabilities.

The guide is written in plain language for persons with disabilities who want to buy or rent a publicly or privately owned apartment, house, condominium, or co-op.

Others who will find the information useful include landlords, housing developers and administrators, real estate agents, zoning officials and advocates.

The content is organized by dozens of specific questions that a person with a disability might have at various stages in the process of acquiring housing or during tenancy.

Do I have to disclose my disability on the rental application?

If I am being evicted because of behavior that is a result of my disability, what should I do? Sidebars list helpful examples, such as types of reasonable accommodations.

One example is an applicant with no recent history because she has been in a psychiatric hospital for two years. Instead of asking for rent history, the landlord can accept a refer-

ence by the applicant's employer or social worker. Nearly 100 endnotes cite and provide key information from court cases.

The work is far more rewarding than you might imagine, and the drawbacks often far less onerous than you might think. It is not for everyone. But put it on your short list of options.

Visit a penitentiary to see what working there is really like. Talk to the folks who have chosen to practice there. What you see and hear might surprise you. —Psychiatric Services

## Bulletin Board

### NARSAD

**Note & Holiday Cards**  
helping artists with mental illness + funding research  
**Call for a FREE Color Brochure**  
**1 (800) 607-2599**

**plan** Delivering special, caring attention to clients with mental illness when the family is not able.

of California  
Call Carla Jacobs 888-574-1258 to find out how NAMI-CA sponsored **PLAN** of California may help you.

Ask for a free brochure by mail!

### VICTORY WELLNESS CENTER

"A free center by and for people recovering from mental illness"  
14411 Vanowen (½ blk east of VN Blvd) Van Nuys  
**818/989-7475**

### 2011 NAMI SFV BOARD MEMBERS

Beth Arnold, Joe Conrad, Zee Dankworth, Milton Decker, Barbara Gauthier, Mary Harpel, Daniel Mahone, Jim Randall, Suzanne Schmidtke, Julia Robinson Shimizu, David Stairs and Tom Walsh.

### NAMI SFV NEWSLETTER

Published bi-monthly for members of NAMI San Fernando Valley. Editor: Tom Walsh. All material not otherwise credited, written by Tom Walsh.

Contact information is listed for agencies that monitor fair housing.

The 54-page booklet, *What "Fair Housing" Means for People With Disabilities*, can be downloaded free or ordered for \$4 from the Bazelon Web site at [www.bazelon.org](http://www.bazelon.org).

—Psychiatric Services