



The Forum

Newsletter by and for members of Schizophrenics Anonymous®

... ON STIGMA ...

By Margery W.
of Niwot, CO

When I speak on mental illness to high school classes, I sometimes start with: "I have a secret. Can you guess my secret? My secret is that I have an illness called schizophrenia."

That gets their attention. Then I go on to describe my experiences.

Maybe one of the reasons I like speaking to high school and college classes is that for my whole life I have had to keep this illness a secret from just about everyone.

EVERY TIME I have had a job and the fact of my illness came to light, I have been fired from that job. This includes my lost job as a social worker. You would think workers in the mental health field would have more compassion and understanding. But they didn't.

My family will not admit that I have a mental illness. My mother says, "Oh, you're just fine. There's nothing wrong with you."

This is not helpful to me. For one thing, it takes away my sense of victory. Of what I have achieved IN SPITE OF this illness. If I'm really just imagining all this, then my achievements have no special significance. The books I have written, the two college degrees, the trips to Europe, working for IBM, etc. If you factor the schizophrenia into my life, then my life is a miracle. Without the schizophrenia, then I am just a person with frequent job changes.

They used to ask on job applications: Have you ever had a mental illness? Well, this creates a double-bind. If you answer "Yes," then you probably won't get the job, especially if you are up against other applicants who are "normal." If you answer "No," then not only are you lying, but if they find out the truth about you, they will probably fire you anyway. So you lose either way.

No other illness has this much stigma. The one exception may be AIDS.

When you have a mental illness, you feel like you have a dirty secret. You have to be careful in whom you confide. Even your friends may not know about your secret. Or they may know about it, but not want to talk about it. And you certainly don't tell the people you work with. Chances are, they wouldn't understand.

Stigma. We need to get rid of it. Mental illness is like any other illness.

From the Founder...

As the holidays grow nearer, it is a time to give thanks and count our blessings, reflect on past successes and look forward to bright futures. We must be thankful and grateful for Eric Hufnagel, who, through his dedication, humbleness, enthusiasm and belief in the NSF, has meant so much to us these past 20 years. We can be thankful for our families and friends, and the new families we have found in our fellow SA members.

We must give thanks to life's little successes – even something as simple as taking a shower – because all together they add up to large successes, bringing us closer to recovery.

We have to keep in mind the mentally ill who are still seeking help, by spreading the word and getting our message out. People can and do recover from our illness. Always remember to love one another as you would want to be loved and to treat others as you would want to be treated. These are rules to remember not only during the holiday season but all year long.

As Americans, we must be proud of our country. We can be thankful for our freedom and that we are all created equally. We are the soul of SA, and this holiday season we must be thankful that we can find friendship, strength and courage in one another.

– Joanne Verbanic

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SA Group Listings

Schizophrenics Anonymous® (SA) is a six-step, self-help support group for persons with schizophrenia and related disorders. Administered by the National Schizophrenia Foundation, SA promotes self-help as an adjunct to professional help and the use of medication. SA groups are run by their collective membership, have no dues, governing bodies, or by-laws. The following is a current listing of active SA groups. For more information, call (800) 482-9534, ext. 103.

ALABAMA

Mobile

ARIZONA

Tucson

CALIFORNIA

Bakersfield
Chula Vista
Downey
Fairfield
Gardena
Hollywood
Lancaster
Long Beach
Palmdale
Sacramento (2)
San Diego
San Francisco
Santa Rosa
Tehachapi
Van Nuys (2)
Visalia

COLORADO

Delta
Lakewood
Littleton
Pueblo

CONNECTICUT

Ansonia
Bridgeport (2)
Danbury
Enfield
Middletown
Newington
Norwalk
Norwich (2)
West Haven

FLORIDA

Goldenrod
Hollywood
Jacksonville (2)
Lauderhill
Oakland Park
Port Charlotte
St. Petersburg
Tampa
West Palm Beach

GEORGIA

Atlanta
Columbus

IDAHO

Idaho Falls

ILLINOIS

Blue Island
Wheaton

INDIANA

Bloomington
Lafayette

IOWA

Decorah

KANSAS

Wichita

KENTUCKY

Covington

MARYLAND

Gaithersburg
Wheaton

MASSACHUSETTS

Quincy

MICHIGAN

Adrian (3)
Ann Arbor (7)
Bay City
Benton Harbor
Berkley
Big Rapids
Charlotte
Detroit (4)
Eastpointe
Flint
Fowlerville
Grand Rapids
Holly
Inkster
Ionia
Kalamazoo (2)
Lansing
Lincoln Park
Livonia
Muskegon
Oak Park (2)
Petoskey
Roseville
Royal Oak
Saginaw
Traverse City
Westland
Ypsilanti (10)

MINNESOTA

Mankato

MISSOURI

Kansas City (2)

NEBRASKA

Lincoln

NEW JERSEY

Bridgewater
Jersey City
Lakewood
Mountain Lakes
New Brunswick
Princeton

NEW YORK

Bronx (2)
Hudson Falls
Rego Park
Rochester (2)

N. CAROLINA

Carrboro
Durham

N. DAKOTA

Grand Forks

OHIO

Amelia
Cambridge
Cincinnati
Cleveland
Columbus (3)
Dayton
Elyria
Lancaster
Lisbon
Mansfield
Middleburg Hgts.
Newark
Port Clinton
Portsmouth
Springfield
Toledo
Worthington
Youngstown
Zanesville

PENNSYLVANIA

Bloomsburg
Erie
Greensburg
Morrisville
Pittsburgh

S. CAROLINA

Camden
Columbia (2)

TEXAS

Abilene
Austin
El Paso
Ft. Worth
Lubbock
Richardson

VIRGINIA

Falls Church (2)

WASHINGTON

Medical Lake

WISCONSIN

Madison

ABROAD:

Australia
Brazil
Canada
Mexico
Venezuela

Choosing to be well

by Larry A.
of Lansing, MI

These days, one can hardly consult a "Health Column" without being inundated with ads for "nutritional supplements/medicinal herbs." The news ranges from "The Miraculous Powers of Tubers," to "Nature's Antidepressants." The problem with this is three-fold: 1) How pure and potent are these materials? 2) What are their side-effects? and 3) Do these plants mix well with prescribed psychiatric medications? (I will not address the issue of whether these herbal remedies are safe and effective for the treatment of health problems. The only agency with the power to regulate these materials is the Food and Drug Administration.)

Issue 1) There is currently no set standard for purity or potency of these materials. The FDA does not regulate "plants" or plant preparations unless they are "processed." The only stipulation for herbal product labeling is the disclaimer that the material is not certified as a "treatment" of any "disease." The potency of one field of St. John's Wort might be very different from another, but the consumer has no proof of this difference.

Issue 2) While every FDA-approved medicine comes packaged with a document listing the known effects and side-effects of each drug, this is not the case with herbal supplements. We can look at the package insert of any SSRI-antidepressant and get the details of side-effects.

But do you really know the long-term side effects of kava or ma huang plants?

Issue 3) Finally, every licensed medication has been tested for effects on folks who might likely be taking other medications. The FDA formal approval process typically takes 15 years or more for a new chemical compound to go from laboratory to market. The package insert in your medications lists other drugs we should not use while receiving treatment. There are no standards like this for herbs and supplements. Even "accepted and controlled" compounds can cause harm when mixed with herbal supplements, but we are ignorant and unprotected when we choose to use them.

While this article is meant to raise the consciousness of my readers regarding use of herbal and supplemental alternatives to medical care, the wisest patient is one who consults his or her mental health professional before taking any non-prescribed "medication."

Oh Brother Mine...

Oh Brother mine take my hand. I am weak in many ways, but also I am strong.

Don't be afraid if you fall. I will pick you up, and we will stand so tall.

For you are my brother. I can not turn away.

For you are my brother. For life and all eternity.

- Pat K., Charlotte Harbor, FL

Schizophrenics Anonymous Materials Order Form

Please note which item(s) you are requesting. Make checks payable to **National Schizophrenia Foundation**.

- SA Materials Order Form. A complete list of materials available for purchase (FREE).
- Yes. I would like to receive a free brochure which briefly describes the Schizophrenics Anonymous program (FREE).
- Yes. I would like to receive the SA Blue Book (\$2.25 each).
- Yes. I would like to receive the "For People in Recovery..." brochures: *An Introduction* *Symptoms* *How to Talk With...* (\$1.50 each or \$4.00 for the set).
- Yes. I would like to receive a copy of the video tape "Joanne Verbanic: On SA and Schizophrenia" (\$15.00).
- Yes. I would like to support the National Schizophrenia Foundation with a financial contribution.
- Enclosed is my check for (please circle): \$25.00 \$50.00 \$100.00 \$ Other
- Yes. I am interested in forming an SA group and would like to learn more about the "Start-Up Package."

Name Phone () e-mail

Address City State Zip

Total Enclosed: \$ Method of Payment: Check Credit Debit

Visa Mastercard

Billing Address (if different than above)

Account Number Expiration Date

City State Zip

Name (as it appears on the card)

Signature

Complete this order form and send it, along with a check, money order or credit card information to:
National Schizophrenia Foundation, 403 Seymour Street, Suite 202, Lansing, MI 48933. Phone: (517) 485-7168. Fax: (517) 485-7180.

Techniques for coping with hallucinations, stress, medication side effects & depression

by Tamara J. Navarro, CPRP, PhD, MFT
of Sacramento, CA

Some of the following are specific suggestions for dealing with hallucinations compiled by Patricia E. Deegan, PhD. But I feel they are just as useful for stress, medication side effects and depression. I've added some of my own techniques and some clarification.

Techniques using your own voice:

1. Speak with someone.
2. Sing quietly to yourself.
3. Count under your breath.
4. Repeating a mantra to yourself as "I am safe, I am OK."
5. Reading out loud.

Distraction:

1. Shift your attention away from the voices and onto things outside yourself.
2. Try activities or tasks that require your full attention such as housework, gardening, a sports event, reading, etc.
3. Change your environment. If you are outdoors go in doors. Change rooms if you are indoors.

Using earplugs:

1. Some people say that using earplugs reduces or eliminates auditory hallucinations.
2. Another technique is to experiment with using just one earplug in either ear.

Time Out:

1. Sometimes people react poorly to crowds of people. At times it is helpful to avoid over-stimulating environments.
2. When you are feeling overwhelmed tell yourself to just stop. Sit for a few minutes. Then make a list of the things you have to do and prioritize them. Next tackle them one at a time and cross them off one at a time.

Listening to favorite things:

1. Listening to music may help.
2. Be creative. Listen to sports broadcast or radio talk programs.
3. Make some tapes about happy places and/or events.

Telling the voices to stop:

1. Tell the voices to stop.
2. Be sure that after you say stop you think of something pleasant.

Avoid chemicals that make your voices worse:

1. You need to find out for yourself which chemicals you need to avoid.
2. Here is short list of chemicals that have proved to aggravate voices in many people: Alcohol; marijuana, crack, LSD, and other

street drugs; psychiatric drugs can sometimes have adverse effect; caffeine; over-the-counter medications.

3. Be careful of taking some prescribed or over-the-counter medications. Some of these can interfere with your body's absorption of your psychotropic medications. Talk to your pharmacist.

Physical exercise:

1. Walk, ride a bike, swim, dance, etc.
2. Physical arousal can help, like turning up the music or "conducting your own symphony."

Tuning out the voices:

1. First practice tuning out real noise.
2. Then tune out the voices.
3. See your voices as just a radio in the background, and focus on whatever you're doing at that time.

Relaxation:

1. Meditation.
2. Hot tub or shower.
3. Practice relaxing and tensing different muscle starting with your toes and progressing up through each muscle group and ending at the top of your head.
4. Have soothing pictures you can look at. I have a picture of a little bunny who is so cute, and another picture of a mother giraffe kissing her baby on the head.
5. Having your head massaged or better yet if you have someone close get them to massage your feet or back.
6. Eat a favorite food. Be careful you don't over do it.
7. The best remedy for anger is time. Walk away and deal with the issue later.

Humor:

1. Watch a funny movie.
2. Joke about some of your odd behaviors. My son teases me sometimes. But he does it in such an affectionate way that sometimes I can love myself.

Inappropriate behaviors:

1. Some behaviors can be replaced for a more acceptable behavior. Like I used to bounce back and forth on the couch, and it was soothing for me. But I didn't want the child I was carrying to see that, so I switched to a rocking chair instead.
2. Think before you speak. Some of us blurt out odd associations or go off on odd tangents.

Triggers:

1. Identify your triggers, things that set you off and try to avoid them.
2. Also identify symptoms or behaviors that may alert you to take action to avoid more serious problems or even hospitalizations.

SA activity is strong in the Columbus, OH, area

by Lisa O.

Greetings from our four SA groups in the Columbus area, Ohio, USA! Please allow me to introduce some of the dedicated leaders, of whom we in Columbus area are so proud: SA – Worthington has several co-leaders including Frances A., Jeff T. and Lisa O. Pathways, our local clubhouse, has a number of group leaders in their SA meetings, too, which include Kay N. and Holly H. Our in-patient groups include Kay N. and Darrell H. at Riverside Hospital, and at Doctors West hospital the SA group is led by Lisa O.

Please notice that whenever and wherever possibility permits, we have several co-leaders for each group, without necessarily specifying a leader. We are proud of this system, as we have discovered that this works for us very well against the variable energy levels present in many of our members. We find this structure a great way to avoid burnout while encouraging individual enhancement, development, confidence and ingenuity among our people. What a great deal for all of us!

Lisa O. has personally discovered when she wears out during a meeting, there is always someone there to continue with the program. This is an asset by any other name, because it happens for more than one of us. We received a copy from Jim C. (CT, SA – Thanks, Jim!) of a written format of how he and his other leaders run their meetings. Lisa O. has also discussed this format with Benjie C. of SC. He strongly supported this format also, as easier for running meetings, even though he was, at the time, running meetings by himself.

The hospital in-patient groups are new, and have been great experience in the possibilities of SA meeting opportunities. We also have had people from these in-patient groups later join our community groups as a result of learning about us during their hospital stays.

Riverside and Doctors West are something of an experiment. The hospitals themselves have forty-five minute to one hour groups of activities from 9 am to 4 pm in which they mix everything from goal-setting to relaxation time. AA, Al-Anon, and NAMI, who also share time there, all come in to tell about their groups as a way to explain what support is available to patients on the outside. Because of the formatting of SA, we have the ability – and do – actually run meetings during our allotted times so that we are offering help right on the spot! At the same time, they are learning that we are available in the community, too.

The feedback for these programs has been both heartwarming and insightful. The hospitals have been very complimentary as well as supportive, including a “self-care” attitude as part of their standards of expectations of self-care in their volunteers. Nobody is permitted to take on a schedule that is more than he or she can handle – these are rules set by the hospital’s behavioral health administrators of the activities programs. They have been terrific support in our work.

We have discovered, through the auspices of Columbus – Worthington’s facilitator (thank you, Cindy V.) that Worthington’s

group may have a problem with local public transportation as affecting the group’s growth and development, even though this SA group is on a direct bus line itself. When we started to get a number of people who were “one-timers,” Cindy decided to create a very short questionnaire for newcomers to fill out at the end of their first meeting in order to discover our strengths and weaknesses from a “new set of eyes” point-of-view. This is a brand new idea, so we have not had much opportunity yet, but we feel this an encouraging step for future expansion of both our numbers and our personal growth as individuals within a group.

Our local MHA sponsor is looking into starting another group at Ohio State University Hospital in-patient unit, but despite the fact that this is only preliminary work, Darrell H. and Lisa O. are ready to help with the homework. Since OSU operates their hospitals differently from the way our other hospital experiences have gone, we know that we will have to reformat our thinking to fit the structure of the hospital without changing the structure of our basic SA meeting format, the latter which has served us so well. Ironically, time on the inside as a patient over the years is serving quite well as a contact network now. What a bonus, that we hope will pay off in understanding, cooperation and success on all sides.

As if all this were not enough, Frances A. and Darrell H. both received MHA awards this year for their contributions to the community, and Kay N. is becoming a real asset to our Pathways clubhouse. Way to go, you folks! Lisa O., with the help of a change of medications, has also chosen to take on the responsibilities of a Group Leader Liaison (GLL). Your thoughts for all of our efforts are appreciated.

Thus, it is that Lisa O. can write, in all honesty, that we in the Columbus area of Ohio are testing the limits of serenity in accepting the things we cannot change, grabbing courage with both hands to change the things we can, and daring to take the chances to discover the difference.

Thank you SA for the strength, guidance, wisdom and support you provide us daily. We could not do this without the help and care from all of you.



Schizophrenics Anonymous® is a self-help network for persons with schizophrenia and related disorders. SA is administered by the National Schizophrenia Foundation, a 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit organization.

All submissions for *The Forum* should be directed to Schizophrenics Anonymous c/o National Schizophrenia Foundation
403 Seymour Street, Suite 202
Lansing, MI 48933
(800) 482-9534, ext. 105
Fax: (517) 485-7180
www.NSFoundation.org

Mark your calendar!

Schizophrenia Awareness Week

May 22 - 28, 2005

Sponsored by the **National Schizophrenia Foundation**.
Community Action Kits are available by contacting the NSF.

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**Schizophrenics Anonymous  
20th Anniversary Conference**

**Mental Health System Transformation:  
the Role of People with Schizophrenia**

**July 6 - 8, 2005**

**Metro-Detroit**

Hosted by the **National Schizophrenia Foundation**.  
Content will be appropriate for all stakeholders  
and consumers. Details will be on the Foundation's  
Web site as available. Interested persons can be added  
to the conference mailing list by calling the NSF.

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**SA Leadership
Development Conference**

July 7 - 9, 2005

Metro-Detroit

Leadership and program training for current and prospective
SA leaders (overlaps the SA 20th Anniversary Conference).

**Scholarship applications now available
for those battling severe mental illness**

Application deadline is January 14, 2005

The Center for Reintegration, a non-profit organization working to improve the lives of persons with mental illness, announced that applications for the 2005-2006 Lilly Moving Lives Forward Reintegration Scholarship are currently available.

Interested candidates can now obtain the application from the Center For Reintegration's Web site at www.reintegration.com. The application deadline is January 14, 2005.

Sponsored by Eli Lilly and Company, the scholarship program was designed to help persons with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and related schizophrenia-spectrum disorders to acquire the educational and vocational skills necessary to move their lives forward and reintegrate into society. For the 2004-2005 school year, 50 students were awarded the Lilly Moving Lives Forward Reintegration Scholarship.

This is the second year that The Center For Reintegration has made the application available via the web. Last year, a record number of applicants opted to download the forms from www.reintegration.com.

A limited number of hard copy applications will still be available to anyone without Internet access. Individuals wishing to receive an application by mail may call the hotline at 800-809-8202.



Schizophrenics Anonymous
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