March General Meeting Notes

At the March 28 General Meeting, we introduced Dr. David Young, the new director of SMC Behavioral Health & Recovery Services. Dr. Young opened with a warm and open account of his background, including growing up in the Bay Area. His father and role model was a physician with a “compassionate heart” which he hopes to emulate. He became a clinical psychologist and worked in a variety of private settings before moving into the public sector. As a family member himself, he strongly supports NAMI’s family and peer programs and believes that stronger peer and community-based initiatives will help to lessen the need for liberalizing “forced care.” He looks forward to partnering with NAMI SMC to sustain our mutual goals through innovation, financial and clinical support, and introduction of better technology systems into the treatments being provided. He envisions an organized system of care in the county that is consumer-oriented, quality and equality-driven, and technology-enabled.

Dr. Young’s highest priorities include:

**Enhancing Capacity.** Using organizations in the community more efficiently especially as leadership and staff shifts occur. Opening systems to new ideas and fiscally healthy practices.

**Peer & Family Summit:** Open doors, engage all of the partners, and create a strong infrastructure to enhance access to services for all peers, caregivers, and anyone addressing mental health issues.

**Technology:** Shifting the focus of our efforts from tangibles like supporting office space to implement support groups, training, and other services to developing more technology systems and online tools instead. An example would be virtual support groups.

With the visionary leadership Dr. Young brings to our county, we hope more of you, our members and friends will decide this is the time to become more involved and bring your skills and energy to NAMI SMC as a volunteer. You can make a difference as a mentor, teacher, support group leader, fundraiser, office/tech support person and much more. We need help to expand our services. Call 650-638-0800 or nami@namissanmateo.org.

**Personal Stories of Change & Understanding**

My Name is Loren. I am 28 years old. I am a musician, a student, a daughter, a sister, a wife, a friend, a baker, and a weekend gardener. I am grateful to live a full, vivacious life but it has not come to me easily. I live with a diagnosis of Bipolar Schizoaffective Disorder.

Before I was diagnosed, living day to day was excruciatingly painful. I suffered from symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, paranoia, depression, anxiety, and mania. There were times I couldn’t not sleep more than half an hour each night for months and other periods where I slept for twenty hours a day for several weeks straight. I spent my early twenties wondering around not-so-friendly parts of San Francisco in a zombie like state. I lacked basic hygiene skills and could only find the motivation to drape my body in the same oversized sweatshirt, thin leggings covered in holes, and my one pair of dingy house slippers every single day. I thought I could read the minds of strangers and that I was possessed by (Continued on page 7)
15th Annual Circle of Support Luncheon

Friday, April 27 • 11am - 1pm
Sharon Heights Golf & Country Club • Menlo Park

Don’t miss this year’s Caminar Family & Children Services Circle of Support Luncheon! FCS celebrates its 70th year of service this year. It reaches more than 12,000 people annually through its behavioral health, family violence prevention, youth development, and family support programs. For more information please contact 650-513-1509 or development@caminar.org.

2018 NAMI California Annual Conference

United Voices
A Stronger California

Friday, June 1—Saturday, June 2
Hyatt Regency Monterey Hotel & Spa
Del Monte Golf Course
1 Old Golf Course Road, Monterey

Check out this exciting LOCAL conference at https://namica.org/conference/

For Early Bird registration visit:
https://41339.thankyou4caring.org/2018-pre-super-early-bird-registration

For special hotel pricing please call (831) 372-1234 or go to https://aws.passkey.com/go/2018NAMI

Please reach out to us with any questions or to submit/complete exhibitor reservations. For Non-Profit rates, forms and completed reservations please email marcel@namica.org.

Facilitators Needed

We’re looking for persons to facilitate our programs! Training is provided to lead our education programs, presentations and support groups - please contact the NAMI office at 650-638-0800 for details.

We are also looking for individuals with lived experience who are interested in telling their story for In Our Own Voice presentations.

We are grateful for donations...

...in memory of
Daniel Mellone from Ann Titley-Baker
Laurie Williams from Donna & Debra Mechanic
Laurie Williams from Steve and Pat Way
Laurie Williams from Helene Zimmerman

NAMI San Mateo County appreciates those who send donations that honor loved ones. Our sincere gratitude!

Docent Led Wildflower Walk & Picnic

Saturday, May 5 • 9am-1:00pm
(arrive by 8:45am please)
Edgewood Park & Nature Preserve
6 Old Stage Coach Road
Redwood City

$35 donation. Presented by NAMI SMC. Pre-registration required, contact nami@namisanmateo.org or 650-638-0800.

Alan Cochran Awarded Hall of Fame Award

The San Mateo County Mental Health & Substance Abuse Recovery Commission recently honored Alan Cochran with the annual Consumer Hall of Fame Award, which recognizes those who have found recovery from mental illness and are active in the behavioral health community to better the lives of other consumers.

NAMI SMC nominated Alan for his knowledgeable, resourceful advocacy for persons with mental illness. He relates extremely well to his peers, is eager to share his knowledge and is very comfortable sharing his lived experience.

Alan first heard about NAMI and our programs in 2012 when he was asked to speak at one of the General Meetings – it was the first large group to which he had presented.

Since those early beginnings, Alan has completed the NAMI Peer to Peer class, taken the training to become a co-teacher and has successfully co-taught his first class. On an on-going basis Alan tells his story at many of our outreach events including at the San Mateo Medical Center, various churches and business and professional groups. Alan has also taken the 40-hour Art of Facilitating Self-Determination, and also serves on our Board of Directors where his personal experience and knowledge of BHRS and other agencies is beneficial.

Alan likes working with NAMI and helping others because he knows how hard it was for him to get the help he needed, and he wants to help make it easier for others.

Alan is a great asset to our In Our Own Voice presentation team, our Peer to Peer teaching team, and our Board. We are extremely fortunate to have Alan’s help to fulfill our mission. Helping others is his passion – he does it well.

Car Donations Accepted!

Thank you for considering NAMI-SMC as your donation destination!

A free, convenient service for converting that extra car, truck, or RV into a tax deductible donation benefitting NAMI San Mateo County. You can donate online (http://www.v-dac.com/?id=94-2650681) or call 877-999-8322 to make your donation. Thank You!
Supporting Someone Close to You

If you have a family member or friend who has been diagnosed with a serious mental illness, you are probably wondering what you can do to help. Although new forms of therapy, medications and community services have enabled many individuals to lead full, independent lives, support from family, friends and peers remains an essential element in the recovery process.

There are many ways you can help someone with a mental illness navigate the treatment system and work towards recovery. As in any relationship, emotional and practical support is always needed. Occasionally, family and friends participate in someone's recovery by offering transportation, financial and housing assistance. Whatever form it takes, your support, compassion and respect matter.

Knowing when and how to give support can be difficult to figure out, however. Though you may want to protect your family member or friend, remember that learning to manage one's own affairs, pursue goals and become independent are important aspects of an individual's recovery from mental illness.

Medication Issues

Many individuals with mental illness take some type of medication to help control their symptoms. For those with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, this may involve taking antipsychotic medications. Although antipsychotic treatments have improved over the past 10 years, they still can cause side effects that lead to other problems that can make your friend or family member feel even worse. As a result, they may stop taking their medication.

Individuals with serious mental illness may not feel comfortable discussing their symptoms, feelings or medication side effects with family members and friends. However, a key element in recovery is productive, two-way communication between patient and doctor - what Mental Health America calls a Dialogue for Recovery. A Dialogue for Recovery that is based on mutual respect with a team of health care professionals can make a big difference in helping your family member or friend recover.

Support Strategies

Here are some tips for supporting someone close to you:

- Educate yourself about the diagnosis, illness symptoms and side effects from antipsychotic treatments and other medications. Local Mental Health America affiliates, public libraries and the Internet are good resources to learn about mental illnesses and treatment options.
- Recognize that your family member or friend may be scared and confused after receiving a diagnosis. Though some people are relieved to receive a diagnosis and actively seek treatment, it may feel devastating to others and bring on stressful feelings.
- Listen carefully to your family member or friend and express your understanding back to him or her. Recognize the feelings he or she is experiencing and don't discount them, even if you believe them to be symptoms of the illness.
- Encourage your family member or friend to become an active member with his or her treatment team to gain knowledge about what treatments and services will help with recovery.
- Recognize that it may take time for your family member or friend to find the proper medications and dosages that work.
- Understand that recovery from mental illness isn't simply a matter of "just staying on one's medications." Self-esteem, social support and a feeling of contributing to society are also essential elements in the recovery process.
- Encourage your family member or friend to speak immediately to his or her healthcare provider about any problems related to medications. Your support in encouraging an ongoing Dialogue for Recovery can benefit your loved one's recovery.
- Obtain the Antipsychotic Side Effects Checklist (ASC) and help your family member or friend fill it out. Only do so, however, if they have indicated that your help is desired. Encourage them to bring it to the next doctor's appointment. A copy of the checklist is available on Mental Health America's web site, on the Dialogue for Recovery fact sheet.
- Offer to accompany your family member or friend to medical and other appointments and, if he or she wants you to, discuss medication and side effects with the doctor and the treatment team of social workers, counselors, nurses or other professionals.
- Always respect the individual's need for and right to privacy. A person with a mental illness has the same right to be treated with dignity and respect as any other person.

For more information or to obtain additional Dialogue for Recovery materials, please contact your local Mental Health America affiliate. You can also find useful tips on our website by accessing the "Mental Illness and the Family" at http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/family-friends.

Visit www.namicalifornia.org/ to get the latest on legislative activity. We appreciate your participation in advocacy!
New Additions to the Library

Please visit the library at the NAMI San Mateo County office - we have books and videos available to check out! Watch for our latest additions below. If you have read a book related to Mental Health issues that you believe would benefits others, please email the office with the title and author.

Thirteen Reasons Why by Jay Asher

*Thirteen Reasons Why* is a young adult novel written in 2007 by Jay Asher. It is the story of a young high school student as she descends into despair brought on by betrayal and bullying, culminating with her suicide. She details the thirteen reasons why in an audio diary which was mailed to a friend two weeks after her death.

*Thirteen Reasons Why* has received recognition and awards from several young adult literary associations, and the paperback edition reached #1 on the New York Times Best Seller list in July 2011. A screenplay was written, based on the original release of the book, that became the basis of the dramatic television series *13 Reasons Why* released through Netflix on March 31, 2017. The screenplay contains several deviations from the book, including, but not limited to, name changes, plot elements, and character personalities.

*Thirteen Reasons Why* brings awareness to multiple issues that plague our society.

MHSARC Meetings  Open to the public
(Mental Health & Substance Abuse Recovery Commission)

**FULL COMMISSION MEETINGS**
1st Wednesday, monthly: 3pm-5pm
*Time/locations vary, check 650 573-2544 or www.smchealth.org/MHSARC
Health Services Building, Room 100
225 W. 37th Ave. San Mateo, CA

**AGE FOCUSED COMMITTEES**

**Older Adult Committee:**
1st Wednesday monthly: 11am-12noon
*Call for location: 650 573-2544
Adult Committee Meeting:
3rd Wednesday, monthly: 10:30am-11:30am

**Children and Youth Committee Meeting:**
3rd Wednesday, monthly: 4pm-5pm

Family to Family Teachers Needed

Due to a growing demand to participate in NAMI’s signature Family to Family program, we offer 6 classes in English during the year and 2 in Spanish. However, in order to do so, we need additional teachers! If you are a Family to Family graduate who would like to give back and teach classes - we need you!

Training is provided over a long weekend. Please contact the NAMI office at 650-638-0800 for details or email us at nami@namisanmateo.org

Jail Chaplain

Spiritual counseling for incarcerated persons - contact Marty at St.Vincent de Paul Society: 650-796-0767.

To All Our Volunteers!

~ THANK YOU ~
We couldn’t do it without you!

**Newsletter Mailing:** Mary Beaudry, Laura Mobraten and Joyce Yokoe

**Office Support:** Eveline Coffman – Accounting and Grace Hand

**All of our Support Group Leaders:**

**Newsletter production:** A special acknowledgement to Ruan Frenette, Gregg Hardin, Kim Nobles and Pat Way

Update on NAMI SMC’s Peer PALS Program

We welcome Stacy Duffy PsyD, our new Peer PALS Advisor. As an Clinical Psychologist, Stacy will be instrumental in supporting our Peer PALS through their partnerships and will also facilitate the monthly PAL trainings. We graciously welcome you aboard!

While we continue to look for Peer and PAL applicants, we have an immediate need for PAL applicants who wish to contribute their friendship and support to individuals who could greatly benefit from it. Please consider signing up to be a PAL and make a difference in someone’s life. Interested individuals can learn more about this FREE program at http://namisanmateo.org/about-us/jobs-and/ or email Rocio at peerpals@namisanmateo.org.

**Peers:** This program helps decrease loneliness and isolation, increase comfort in social situations and self-esteem, and convey lifestyle habits that promote and maintain recovery.

**PALS:** First complete NAMI’s Peer to Peer class or similar education/mentoring classes through a community service agency or college. To discuss the program, call 650-638-0800. Join us!

**EVERY Monday of the month • 7:00-8:30pm**
NAMI office, 1650 Borel Place, #130, San Mateo

**Connection** provides persons with mental health conditions a gathering of respect, understanding, encouragement and hope. The group is led by trained individuals who are experienced at living well with mental illness. **No registration is required.** Just drop by; we look forward to meeting you. Contact 650-638-0800 or education@namisanmateo.org with any questions.

Social Security Benefits or Vocational Rehab Questions?
Call Wendy Jordan at 650-802-6482
### SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS (for information on NAMI Support groups call 650-638-0800)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MONDAY</td>
<td>NAMI Cordilleras MHR Center Family Group</td>
<td>1st Mondays (2nd if 1st is a holiday), 6:30-8pm, 200 Edmonds Roac Redwood City, 650-367-1890. Penney Mitchell &amp; Julie Curry, NAMI SMC co-facilitators.</td>
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<td>TUESDAY</td>
<td>NAMI Parents of Youth &amp; Young Adults (ages 6-26)</td>
<td>2nd Mondays, 7-8:30pm. 222 W. 39th Ave. &amp; Edison, Board Room, San Mateo. Park in the large lot on west side of building, off 37th Ave. Enter building through the &quot;Hospital &amp; Clinic West Entrance,&quot; follow the NAMI signs to the 2nd floor Board Room W-225. 638-0800. Ginny Traub &amp; Florian Davos. facilitators.</td>
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<td>NAMI Coastside Support Meeting</td>
<td>for family members, 2nd Mondays, 6:30-8pm. El Centro De Libertad; 225 Cabrillo Hwy South Ste #1 14B (the bldg next to Coastside ME), Half Moon Bay. Info: 650-638-0800.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NAMI Connection</td>
<td>for persons working on their wellness &amp; recovery. Every Monday, 7-8:30pm. 1650 Bore! Place 4130, San Mateo. Call NAMI SMC 650-638-0800 for information.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cafe para Padres</td>
<td>ultimo Martes de cada mes. Clinica Shasta 727 Shasta St. Redwood City. Para preguntas contacte a Yolanda Ramirez al 650-599-1047</td>
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<td>WEDNESDAY</td>
<td>NAMI Spanish-Speaking Support Group</td>
<td>2nd Tues, 6-7:30pm, 802 Brewster, RWC. 650-573-2189.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NAMI Jewish Family &amp; Children's Services</td>
<td>family and friends are welcome. 4th Tuesdays, 7:00pm. 200 Charm-ing Ave., Palo Alto. Contact Pamela Polos, pamelapoloscomcast.net.</td>
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<td>NAMI San Mateo Medical Center</td>
<td>for family members. 1St and 3rd Tuesdays, 6:30-8pm. 222 W. 39th Ave. &amp; Edi-son, San Mateo. Board Room (main entrance elevator to 2nd floor, left to the end of the hall). Carol Metzler &amp; Judy Singer, NAMI facilitators.</td>
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<td>NAMI South County Support Meeting</td>
<td>for family members, 2nd Tuesdays, 6-7:30pm. Mental Health Clinic, 802 Brewster, RC, 650-363-4111. Pat Way, NAMI SMC facilitator; Liz Downard RN, MSN. Park behind building and knock loudly on door.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>DBSA Mood Disorder Support Group</td>
<td>for persons with uni- and bi-polar disorders, mania, depression, or anxiety; family members welcome. Tuesdays, 7-9pm, College Heights Church, 1150 W. Hillsdale Blvd, San Mateo. Contact at <a href="mailto:DBSASanMateo@um.att.com">DBSASanMateo@um.att.com</a> or 650-299-8880; leave a message.</td>
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<td>Individuals Living With Their Own Mental Illness</td>
<td>Tuesdays, 1-2:30pm. Redwood City - Sequoia Counseling Services, sliding scale fees apply. Contact Deborah at 650-363-0249, x111.</td>
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<td>Parent Chat</td>
<td>for parent/caregivers of kids aged 14-24 with mental health challenges. 2nd &amp; 4th Tuesdays, 7-8:30pm. Orchard Room, Los Altos Library, 13 San Antonio Rd. Info: Trudy 650-208-9116 or Donna at 650-823-0997.</td>
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<tr>
<td>THURSDAY</td>
<td>NAMI Stanford</td>
<td>2nd Wednesdays for families and friends/ 4th Wednesdays for spouses and partners. Both: 78:30pm. 401 Quarry Rd #2213, Stanford Dept. of Psychiatry &amp; Behavioral Sciences (parking is between Vine-yard &amp; Quarry). Info: 650-862-2886 or Pamela at pamelapoloscomcast.net / Georgia or <a href="mailto:georgiaevk@gmail.com">georgiaevk@gmail.com</a>.</td>
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<td>Jewish Support Group</td>
<td>open to all denominations), for those with mental illness and families and friends. 2nd Wednesdays, 6:15-8:30 pm. For info, call Carol Irwin 408-858-1372. Beit Kehilah, 26790 Aastradero Rd., Los Altos.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NAMI North County Support Group</td>
<td>for family members. 2nd and 4th Thursdays, 5:45-7pm, 375 89th Street, Comm Room, Daly City. Info: 650-301-8650. Co-facilitators: Karen Pyles LMFT and Valerie Nolan, RN.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Coastside Dual Diagnosis Group</td>
<td>development for clients in all stages of recovery. Thursdays at 4-5pm. 225 So. Cabrillo Hwy #200A, Half Moon Bay. 726-6369 for information.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Body Image &amp; Eating Disorders</td>
<td>Thursdays, 6:30-8pm, 1225 Crane St, Ste 205, Menlo Park. Open to family and friends. RSVP required: <a href="mailto:emlycaruthersmft@gmail.com">emlycaruthersmft@gmail.com</a>. More info: 408-356-1212 or e-mail: <a href="mailto:info@edcrsv.org">info@edcrsv.org</a>.</td>
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<td>H.E.L.P.</td>
<td>for those with a mental illness and/or supporters, Thursdays, 6:00pm optional dinner; 6:30-7:30 program, 7:30-8:30 prayer. Menlo Church, Garden Court. 950 Santa Cruz Ave., Menlo Park. Info: Jane Clark 650-464-9033.</td>
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<td>Korean Support Group</td>
<td>For Family Members: Cupertino, 4th Friday: 12:30-2:30pm. Call for location: Kyo, 408-712-1149.</td>
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<td>Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation</td>
<td>of SF Bay Area, 3rd Saturdays, 1:30-3:30pm, Seton Medical Center, 1900 Sullivan Ave., 2nd Fl. Conf. room near cafeteria, Daly City. Info: 415-273-7273; <a href="http://www.ocdbayarea.com">www.ocdbayarea.com</a>.</td>
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<td>Japanese Education &amp; Support Group</td>
<td>call (415) 474-7310 for information.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Consumer Support Groups, Heart and Soul</td>
<td>call 650-232-7426 for days &amp; addresses, or visit <a href="http://www.heartrandsouline.org">www.heartrandsouline.org</a>.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cluttering &amp; Hoarding Support Groups, Workshops, and Private Consultations</td>
<td>- Groups/programs change, contact Emily Farber, MSW, 650-289-5417, <a href="mailto:efarber@avenidas.org">efarber@avenidas.org</a>.</td>
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NAMI Education Programs
To be added to the Wait List, call 650-638-0800 or email us at education@namisanmateo.org

PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED
Sign up for the evidence-based education class that fits your need. (Support Groups on page 5) Courses are FREE, comprehensive, and popular. Gain skills and understanding in an interactive, supportive environment.

- **Basics**—For parents and caregivers of children and adolescents with mental illness.
- **Family to Family**—For relatives of an adult family member with mental illness. Class meets once a week for 12 weeks.
- **Peer to Peer**—Better living skills for people with mental health issues taught by people with mental health issues.
- **Provider**—for Mental Health and AOD professionals, para-professionals and all others serving individuals with serious mental illnesses and their families. CMEs pending approval for qualified attendees. Please contact us to set up an in-house program for your organization.

Save the Date! - 2018
- **May 6** Let's Talk Mental Health
  [www.shalom.org](http://www.shalom.org)
- **Sept. 22** NAMI Walks – San Jose. More info soon!

Shopping Supports NAMI SMC
Sign up NOW! Tell a friend!
Together, shopping through any of these mediums makes a real difference. For more information, contact the office at 650-638-0800 or nami@namisanmateo.org.

Always start at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) and Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases. When you log onto smile.amazon.com please choose NAMI San Mateo County as your charitable organization; from there your shopping purchases will be linked directly to us!

NAMI San Mateo County News   April 2018

San Mateo County Mental Health Emergency Numbers

**Police:** 911
Tell the dispatcher you are calling regarding a person who has a mental illness. Request a CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) trained officer and/or someone who has experience in dealing with the mentally ill. For non-emergency situations, call your local police department.

**HELPFUL:** Tips to prepare yourself for a 911 call are available on the BHRS website. Download “Mental Health Emergency” at [www.smchealth.org/MH911](http://www.smchealth.org/MH911) or visit the blog: [http://smcbhrsblog.org/2015/03/30/mental-health-emergency-materials-aka-family-script/](http://smcbhrsblog.org/2015/03/30/mental-health-emergency-materials-aka-family-script/)

**24 Hour Crisis Line & Support Help:** 650-579-0350 / 800-784-2433
Calling the local number will get you someone in San Mateo County. Calling the 800 number will get you the first person available. This person may not be in San Mateo County.

**Psych Emergency:** San Mateo Medical Center: 650-573-2662
Mills Peninsula Hospital: 650-696-5915
Kaiser South San Francisco: 650-742-2511
Kaiser Permanente SMC: 650-991-6455

**FAST:** 650-368-3178 | 650-371-7416 (pager)
Family Assertive Support Team - When your loved one is in emotional distress.

For additional non-emergency numbers relating to Mental Health issues, access [www.namisanmateo.org](http://www.namisanmateo.org).
demons. I was lost. I had completely alienated myself from everyone. I constantly obsessed over different ways to end my life until I decided I had enough and tried to commit suicide. I then cycled in and out of psychiatric wards, day programs, other suicide attempts, therapists and psychiatrists for several years. It was a slow process but through trial and error, I accepted treatment and learned how to manage my illness.

Now, I can proudly say, the good days immensely outweigh the bad days. I have lots of good friends and a loving family. I am thankful to have a great support system. I am happily married and live with my loving husband and our dog. I sing and play guitar in a band and I am an undergrad studying for medical school. In my free time I explore my creativity with any kind of crafty or artsy project I can get my hands on. I also enjoy keeping my house tidy, cooking, baking, and entertain guests at my colorful, antique filled house. I am trained as a peer leader for several of NAMI’s programs and love being a part of the NAMI community.

I genuinely believe I would not have been able to feel genuine happiness if I had not experienced such lows. For that reason, I am grateful for all of my experiences because they have all made me who I am today—a strong and compassionate woman.

It’s important for people living around mental illness to know that they are not alone. Sharing a story about your personal experience with mental health challenges—as an individual with a diagnosis, or as a family member or friend—can help with recovery. To learn more about what writing your story might entail and how we can work with you regarding privacy issues, please contact Helene at 650-638-0800 or hzimmer@namisannmateo.org.

**Must I Tell My Boss I’m Absent Because of Mental Illness?**

*By Kwame Anthony Appiah, NYT - The Ethicist 3/20/18*

I am in treatment (weekly therapy and a drug regimen) for clinical depression and a panic disorder. They are, for the most part, very well managed. However, even the most well managed mental illness has flare-ups, during which I find it difficult to get out of bed, am plagued with suicidal thoughts or am so panicked that I need to take medication to calm my heart rate. When these symptoms are occurring, the idea of being able to work is laughable.

These symptoms are not readily understood by my high-powered industry colleagues and bosses. There is a general feeling that “we all get anxious and sad; we buck up and push through.” Personal days and sick days are discouraged, and there are few light days. Moreover, although my co-workers are vaguely aware that I have a condition that requires weekly therapy, the existence of flare-ups like this carries, I feel, a heavy stigma that I am not “up to” our fast-paced job. This is not the case; I am an extremely productive and dedicated worker, and I love my job. These flare-ups happen less than once a month, and I am fastidious about ensuring that my work is covered appropriately when I am out.

My work is in law, with regular can’t-miss meetings with clients, such that a “taking a sick day” message to a boss will generally be met with: “Can you come in for this meeting/court date or call in to this or that?”; “Have you tried DayQuil?” etc. On days when I am so preoccupied with my depression symptoms that I cannot go in, I cannot meaningfully participate in “just one thing”; indeed, trying to do so often makes it more difficult for me to recover. I have found that the easiest way to avoid these requests is to lie and explain that I am ill with a particularly nasty symptom, such as a high fever, strep throat or food poisoning. This normally halts questioning, as those conditions are deemed “serious enough” to warrant a day off. Given the stigma associated with mental health issues, is it ethical for me to lie about the specifics of my symptoms to my boss, or is this similar to calling in a “sick day” when in fact you’re taking a personal day, an act I would consider unethical? Name Withheld

Let’s assume that, over all, your firm has reason to agree that you are, as you say, “an extremely productive and dedicated worker.” Your inclination to be more open about your illness is a good one: When more people like you choose to be open about their struggles, understanding will increase, and the stigma you mention will be reduced. And that’s likely to help people in your situation work productively.

The decision you make will depend on how supportive you think your boss will be, what the culture of your workplace is and how much your contributions are valued. You’ll also want to explain the reality of the disorder — that it’s not a matter of “bucking up and pushing through.” Your employers can accommodate your needs only if you inform them properly of your disability. This would both make your life easier and allow them to plan better; one of the many bad consequences of prejudice is that these win-win outcomes aren’t achieved.

But suppose you decide that your firm would penalize you for being honest and that you can get away with inventing physical illnesses to cover your needs. Would the fact that your employers would respond badly to your being honest justify your continued lying? It would: In general, it’s permissible to mislead people who will do you serious and unwarranted wrong if you tell the truth.

Because you work in the law, you’ll know that the Americans With Disabilities Act requires employers (with 15 or more workers) to make “reasonable accommodations” for conditions that are legally considered disabilities. So if candor proved damaging to your conditions of employment, you might have a remedy. Whether an illness, like depression, is disabling depends, according to the law, on whether it “substantially limits one or more major life activities.” Of course, the law says, as you’d expect, that work is a major life activity. And it was amended in 2008 to define disabilities in a way that explicitly includes conditions like yours that are only episodically disabling, so your clinical depression should meet the test. But in the end, it would be for lawyers to advise you on that question.

A final paradox: If you do go on lying to your employers, they will be justified in penalizing you if they find out. They’re unlikely to be impressed by the argument that you were convinced that they would have behaved badly if you had told them. So I would urge you to consider the harder path of telling the truth. After all, if you’re a terrific worker, they ought to know you’re worth a good deal to them.

Check out Wellness Matters, the SMC BHRS newsletter [http://smchealth.org/wm](http://smchealth.org/wm)
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