eSynapse

May 2015

Editor’s Comments

James Flax, MD, MPH, DFAPA

Once again, I “THANK YOU” to all those who have contributed to this issue of eSynapse! Please scroll through everything that follows, as there are many items you will find interesting and useful throughout.

You will find below a synopsis of our meeting so all readers will have an idea of district branch business. But, it’s only a synopsis. Please come to a meeting to appreciate the rich discussions.

If you are wondering about the available services in Rockland you can check out this website: http://rocklandgov.com/departments/mental-health/provider-agency-links/. We are hoping to have information that reviews the services in Orange, Sullivan and Delaware in future editions of eSynapse.

Russel Tobe has written his last president’s article reflecting on psychiatry in our district. I wish a fond farewell to Russ as he departs the role and am delighted he’ll be staying on the executive council to continue his contributions to our work. Welcome to Dr. Mona Begum, our new President. I look forward to her future contributions to eSynapse. And congratulations to Nigel Bark, our new President-elect!

Dr. Abdullah has again sent us a new article in his long line of erudite essays. There is another poem; this time addressing living with cancer. There are ads that may interest you. Please scroll all the way to the end to see it all. And, if you are not receiving the MSSNY eNews, here’s a link where you can read about issues of interest to all of medicine in New York State: http://www.mssny.org.

WEB SITE Your district branch is still in the process of improving it’s website. Thanks to Dr. John Fogelman. If you have expertise or ideas about web page design, please chime in. You can see the existing “under construction” site at WestHudsonPsych.org. I recently created a website for my private practice. JamesFlaxPsychiatry.com. If anyone
wants advice on how one can create their own (simple) website, I'm happy to discuss it. 845-362-2557 or DrFlax@aol.com.

**PRIVATE PRACTICE: FEES** Here is a link to a legal public site where you can look up fees for a given zipcode. [http://www.fairhealthconsumer.org/](http://www.fairhealthconsumer.org/)

**PRIOR AUTHORIZATIONS** If you are frequently bothered with cumbersome and seemingly unnecessary requests for prior authorizations, the APA is eager to hear from you: Ellen Jaffe, Director, Practice Management HelpLine/Medicare Specialist, Office of Healthcare Systems and Financing, American Psychiatric Association, (703) 907-8591 ejaffe@psych.org Practice Management HelpLine (800-343-4671) - email at hsf@psych.org. Also, one of our members posted to an international list-serv with regard to any denial of benefit, so I quote Dr. John Fogelman:

The URL below will direct you to a database for the regional CMS (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) headquarters. The names of the regional Medical Directors are listed. When you call, hang in through all the options, and at the end type in the name of the medical director. You will get either the real live doc, an assistant, leave a message, or the name of someone to call for an emergency. It usually works.

[http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/sharedsavingsprogram/Regional_Contacts.html](http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/sharedsavingsprogram/Regional_Contacts.html)

My experience has been that the higher you go in any organization (hospital, government, insurance companies), the closer you are to the decision maker, and the decision makers do not have to stay on the unvarying mindless script. They do not instruct you to have a good day, apologize for your inconvenience, thank you profusely and hear how they know how valuable your time is. They usually listen, and if you do not scream at them, a favorable result often follows.

**PLEASE MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO RETURN PHONE CALLS. EVEN IF YOU HAVE NO ROOM IN YOUR SCHEDULE FOR NEW PATIENTS:** I have frequently heard complaints about patients leaving voice mails with psychiatrist's offices and never getting a return phone call. If true, this reflects very poorly on our profession. Yes, I know how many people leave voice mail messages that I can't understand, even after playing it back 6 times with the volume turned up full. Even so, the number of complaints seems to exceed the number of complaints that could be excused due to poor communication. I screen callers with my greeting message that gives enough detail about my practice so many callers know immediately not to bother leaving a message because I don’t take their insurance. This saves valuable time for all.

**Join APA's New 'Find a Psychiatrist' Database:** APA is offering a new member benefit for psychiatrists practicing in the United States and Canada. They are invited to join a new database being added to APA's website that will enable individuals seeking psychiatric care to locate psychiatrists practicing in their area. The goal is to populate the database, known as "Find a Psychiatrist," in the coming weeks before it goes live on APA's website. To join the database, click [here](http://www.fairhealthconsumer.org/). To view the functionality of the database, click [here](http://www.fairhealthconsumer.org/).

**IT'S A FREE LUNCH!**

Next Executive Council Meeting
Il Fresco Restaurant, Orangeburg, NY  
Friday, June 5, 2015  
Journal Club (15 minutes) PROMPTLY at 12:30  
Followed immediately by Business Agenda
Please contact Mona Begum, MD (monabegum81@gmail.com) if you are planning to attend.

Parity Enforcement from NYSPA
If you missed the NYSPA Webinar on parity I strongly suggest you listen to it; accessible on the NYSPA website. Seth Stein and Rachel Fernbach have presented a packet of wonderful new tools that potentially will allow us to be better manage and respond aggressively to insurance company efforts to restrict care.

DR. LOIS KROPLICK GETS ANOTHER NATIONAL AWARD!!!!
For the past 6 years Lois Kroplick has been the medical advisor of the Rockland county chapter of DBSA (depression bipolar support association). She recently learned that she won the award as 2014 DBSA advisor of the year and the local DBSA organization won the large chapter award for 2014! These awards are given by the national organization of DBSA and will be presented during the national conference in Chicago in Sept 2015.

Way to go Lois!

Spring WHPS Dinner and Talk
Paul Summergrad, President of the APA, presented to a group of our members at our annual spring meeting Friday evening, May 1. You should have been there to hear what our leader had to say about the future of our profession. He spoke of the history of psychiatry, the delivery of psychiatric services, the concept of “integrative care” and of it’s impact on the future of psychiatry. You can look at the slides of his entire presentation here: Click here to view. His answers to questions posed by the audience were politically correct but not very informative.

I found the history of interest and I fully embrace the concept of integrating our services with our medical colleagues in primary care; having done so for half of my career. However, I found the explanation of how this might work to be lacking in providing any practical vision of how our profession is going to survive into the future. Please see the previous issue of eSynapsee in which Lois Kroplick provided great detail on the concept of integrative care. Part of the problem I have with this model of care delivery is that the way it’s conceived will only make psychiatrists less accessible and less differentiated from all the other practitioners who care for those with mental disorders (including PhD’s in NY if NYSPA is unsuccessful in derailing current proposed legislation). Why should anyone see one of us? Psychiatrists, as a group, don’t consistently return phone calls (see above), don’t participate in insurance panels to the
same extent as other physicians, spend as little time with our patients as other practitioners and, from what I’ve seen in my practice (including reviewing over 4000 charts from all over the country), we don’t do any better job of diagnosing or treating than all those other “prescribers” and practitioners out there. I think APA could better guarantee our future place in the delivery of care by encouraging all psychiatrists take a patient-centered, customer service, excellence in care approach to everything we do.

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**PRESIDENT’S COLUMN**

Russell Tobe MD ([russell.tobe@gmail.com](mailto:russell.tobe@gmail.com))

Dear West Hudson Psychiatric Society (WHPS) membership, colleagues, and friends:

During this year’s APA meeting, I will be passing the Presidential torch to Mona Begum. Of course, most of us local to Rockland County know Mona well through her over 30 years of service in the area. Being an early career psychiatrist member myself, I have found it a particular pleasure to get to know Mona as President Elect. She is a critical thinker with a calm, conscientious, and even temperament. Mona is uniquely positioned to drive WHPS over the coming two years. She understands several different worlds in psychiatric care, maintaining a private practice in the backdrop of a strong and demonstrated record in public psychiatry and advocacy. For 30 years Mona served in numerous capacities at Rockland Psychiatric Center from Attending Psychiatrist to Medical Director to Vice President of the Medical Staff Organization. She has been a member of WHPS for over 25 years, is a Distinguished Life Fellow of the APA, and been pivotal to development of depression screening programs and legislative initiatives. She remains active in the Rockland County Depression and Bipolar Support Association, where she is an advisor. Needless to say, this is something of an upgrade for WHPS and I am very much looking forward to watching and supporting future initiatives that Mona helps develop in the coming 2 years.

My time in this role feels to have gone fast. Despite this, I consider these past 2 years have been more eventful than most in our field. Of course the big story was DSM 5, and we hit the ground running with numerous trainings despite a series of obstacles in timely transmission of information. We have observed major changes in CPT coding that have facilitated more appropriate reimbursement of essential services, with only an occasional need to file a class action lawsuit against an insurance company. New parity laws have facilitated access to services while the Affordable Care Act has expanded insurance coverage to millions of Americans. We have dealt with electronic prescribing deadlines and then watched those deadlines pushed back. We have pondered if our patients qualified for SAFE Act filing and pulled out hair allocating limited session time to I-STOP verifications. Those of us in research areas have navigated changing research priorities at the Federal level along with budgetary cuts. While those of us at the local level, particularly in Rockland County, have observed the agonal respirations of a once quintessential community service network. I applaud those who built and subsequently mourn these changes but also those who continue to deliver the best possible care in the systems we currently have while advocating for increasing supports and improvements, either independently or in collaboration with numerous other local advocacy groups.
At the branch level, we have seen a wonderful growth in early career psychiatrists and, with that, an increasing model of mentorship amongst our senior members. We have also seen increased involvement of members who were more active in years past. Branch members outside of Rockland County are less infrequent and WHPS programs have more frequently ventured into Orange County. Delaware and Sullivan, stay tuned! We have had wonderful speakers and moments of levity. The website development has been an ongoing process while new initiatives within the Executive Council meetings have seemed productive such as invited guests from major local service agencies and new spins on Journal club to investigate topics of interest such as integrative care and violence assessment.

Finally, Liz Burnich has helped usher in a new area of a better organized and funded branch. We have received several branch development and teaching grants. Our voice on a national level has been organized and reinforced through Liz’s efforts while our representation at the State level has been superb with Dr. Bark.

Personally, I am so very appreciative of all of the mentorship that has been provided to me in this role as a junior colleague. Liz has been a phenomenal teacher while serving as the major organizing and driving force over these two years. She has been a conduit for information and thought generation. Though we have had heated discussions, the entire Executive Council has been collegial and collaborative with a passion in our common goal of improving care and access for patients. Dom Ferro has been a phenomenal support in driving membership initiatives and a chameleon in accepting of (or being volunteered for) other branch roles when needs arose. Jim Flax has brought great experience and sincerity in his efforts to characterize changes in service delivery within the community, maintaining WHPS as a resource to patients and families, and, of course, in continuing the legacy of Synapse. Lois Kroplick has been a wonderful resource in branch education and community outreach. Nigel Bark has been phenomenal in his grasp of the issues at a higher altitude. Raj Mehta has been superb in arranging world-class speakers and providing insight. Other members such as Les Citrome and John Fogelman have been pivotal in lending their experience and knowledge base. And, of course, Mona has been constantly thoughtful and supportive in guiding WHPS initiatives. Finally, thank you to all of those who have contributed that I did not specifically mention. It has been an honor to be a part of this team!

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Summary from Executive Council Meeting
Friday, April 17, 2015


Journal Club: For Journal Club this month, Dr. Mona Begum presented an interesting study on obesity and serious mental illnesses and the impact of exercise as well as its success rate among this population.

Executive Council Vacancies:

- President-Elect – The nominating committee selected Nigel Bark for the 2-year term as President-Elect – term starts at the end of May, 2015). Nigel accepted this nomination and Russ will present this at the May 1 Educational Dinner Meeting for general membership approval.
- **Legislative Rep** – Russ Tobe will take over that position from Mona Begum at the end of May.
- **Treasurer** – Russ Tobe will also take over the position as Treasurer from Dom Ferro at the end of May.
- **Membership Co-Chairs** – Russ will check with Scott Wiener to see if he is still interested in being one of the chairs on the Membership Committee. Dom Ferro will remain as the other Membership Chair.

**Spring 2015 Educational Meeting** – Dr. Paul Summergrad will be the speaker at our Spring 2015 Educational Dinner Meeting on the topic of Integrating Medical and Psychiatric Care. It is scheduled for Friday, May 1, 2015 at 6pm at La Terrazza in New City. Raj will introduce Dr. Summergrad. We have the small room at La Terrazza so we need to limit the number of attendees to 30 people. We already have 20 people who have registered for the event.

- **Objective of this presentation include:**
  - To recognize changes associated with health care reform.
  - To understand the impact of medical and psychiatric co-morbidities on patient outcomes.
  - To understand the impact of medical and psychiatric co-morbidities on the cost of care.
  - To understand implication of healthcare reform for policy.

**Fall 2015 Educational Meeting Speakers:**

- Raj Mehta will get in touch with APA President-Elect (who becomes President this May) Dr. Renee Binder to see if she is interested in being the speaker for our Fall meeting.
- If she is not able to present at our Fall meeting, other people discussed as possible speakers were Nyack Hospital Mental Health team (headed by Dr. K) and Dr. Jeffrey Lieberman.

**Public Forum** – Lois Kroplick advised that the next Public Forum will take place on Wednesday, October 21, 2015 at Rockland Community College.

- Potential topics include ADHD and PTSD. NYSPA has obtained grant $$ from the VA to distribute to NY DBs for presentations on the topic of PTSD. We had a lengthy discussion on whether or not our DB could viably sponsor this event.
- We also discussed approaching the Rockland County Medical Society about co-sponsoring a PTSD meeting with us.

**Rockland County DBSA Award:**

- Lois also advised that the Rockland County Chapter of DBSA (Depression Bipolar Support Group) has won the large chapter award for 2014 and Lois has won the 2014 DBSA Advisor of the Year Award. These awards will be presented at the national DBSA Conference in Chicago in Sept 2015.

**Psychologist Prescribing Opposition Initiative** – Committee consists of Marc, Russ, Mona, Lois, Raj, Dom, Jim and Chuck. Liz contacted Senator Carlucci’s office to arrange a meeting and was told to call back in May. After this meeting is scheduled, Liz will arrange meetings with our Assembly Reps, Ellen Jaffee and Kenneth Zebrowski in Rockland. Liz will also reach out to members in Orange County to speak to local representatives in that area.
**Women’s Meeting** – the May meeting will be held at Dr. Tovah Feldhammer’s office on May 1 at 12:30pm.

**Future Guest to invite to our Executive Council Meeting** – Mona Begum will invite the Acting Rockland County Mental Health Commissioner to update our group on the new Mobile Crisis Team for our June meeting.

**Next Executive Council Meeting** - Friday, June 5, 2015 at 12:30pm at Il Fresco, Orangeburg, NY. This will be our President, Russ Tobe’s last Executive Council meeting and Mona Begum will become our next President for a 2-year term. Jim Flax will present for Journal Club.

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**CORRESPONDENCE**

(Editors note: I vowed when I started this publication to publish anything sent to me. Please send me announcements, news, notices, rumor, recipes, innuendo, ads etc).

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**Alternative Psychotherapy**

Syed Abdullah, M.D.

When I met Larry for the first time in 1974 one of the questions he asked me was “What do you do for a living?” “I am a psychiatrist”, I answered a little self-consciously. He asked me to explain what a psychiatrist did.

Seeing me fumble for an answer he made it easy for me by saying “Why don’t you lend me a standard text book of psychiatry”. In our next meeting I gave him the current edition of the text book that I had used for the Boards examination four years earlier.

Larry kept the book with him for a few months. To my amazement he read the entire book and had this comment to make: “I found the book interesting. It discusses in detail the different aspects of a man’s development from birth to old age. It talks of his emergence as a psycho-social being, his educational, sexual, inter-personal and job related struggles and the challenges and stresses related to them. It also talks about all that can go wrong, including the various disorders that are encountered in different phases of the life-cycle.

It however leaves out any mention of his Spirit, his capacity for transcendence, or his quest for meaning and purpose in life.”

This gentle rejoinder from Larry was a wake-up call for me at a time when I was groping for direction and meaning in my work as a psychiatrist and a psychotherapist. There had to be an alternative to the text-book approach to the human predicament. Here is what I found:

The presence of Alternative Psychotherapy is a well known, if not a well recognized phenomenon in psychiatry. In fact the root of this form of psychotherapy is typically American and predates the psychoanalytic movement by several decades.
From 1830 to 1855 a group of nineteenth Century writers, poets, philosophers and psychologists of New England became loosely linked to an idealistic concept of the unity of all creation, and the belief in the essential goodness of man.

They championed such causes as - anti-slavery movement, suffrage for women, better conditions for workers, temperance and other social concerns. Insight and intuition were rated higher than the logical, linear approach to knowledge.

German transcendentalism, Neoplatonism, the Indian and Chinese writings of the ancients as well as the writings of mystics like Emanuel Swendenborg, Jakob Bohme, Rumi and Hafiz, were freely incorporated in the system of philosophy/psychology propounded by the American transcendentalists.

They included such diverse thinkers as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller and others. William James, M.D. and John Dewey were heavily influenced in their thinking and formulations by the transcendentalists.

Despite this rich heritage, these American thinkers did not produce a coherent system of psychotherapy. Their impact in the field of psychotherapy was further undermined by the emergence of the psychoanalytic movement in Europe.

The sheer brilliance and almost evangelical force of the psychoanalytical ‘crusade’ swept aside the impact of the transcendentalists of America. Jung attempted to bridge the gap between these two bodies of knowledge, but his voice was drowned in the disputes that raged within the psychoanalytic movement.

The writings of Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, who were influenced by the transcendentalists, led to the flowering of the American artists and the evolution of the American Renaissance in literature, but they did not result in a system of psychotherapy that could compete with the burgeoning psychoanalytic avalanche.

In the context of the scientific/technological breakthroughs of the late 19th century, there was little attention paid to alternative psychology that talked about the Soul of Man, and his higher potentials in the realms of love, altruism and other spiritual matters.

Although the transcendentalist relied mainly on their Christian beliefs and the writings of the Christian mystics, they incorporated the spiritual ideals and practices of the Eastern and Middle Eastern religions. Meditation, retreats, communion with nature, and spiritual awakening were their core message.

William James’ book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* was a landmark publication which talked about the levels of consciousness: “...our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but a special type of consciousness, while all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different…No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded...they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality.”

In recent times there has been a renewal of interest in issues pertaining to the soul, that immaterial aspect of a human being that confers individuality and humanity to a person. The undeniable success of the AA movement and other 12 Step programs, is an example of the
relevance of the spiritual factor in psychotherapy.

Two recent publications, in the tradition of the transcendentalists, are worth mentioning here. One by Thomas Moore, titled: *Care Of The Soul*, is an attempt at cultivating depth and sacredness in daily life. Thomas Moore is a New England psychotherapist who has written several books including *The Planets Within*, *Rituals of the Imagination*, and *Dark Eros*.

Besides being influenced by the transcendentalists, Moore also lived as a monk for twelve years and has a Ph. D. in religious studies. He is an exponent of archetypal and Jungian psychology, mythology and the arts. He blends these in his psychotherapy.

His thrust is to reach the depths of the person’s psychological turmoil to dredge out the connections between spirituality and the problems of the individual and society. In this quest he is joined by Wayne Dwyer and other ‘new-age’ psychologists.

The other recent addition on this subject is the book *The Five Stages of the Soul* by Harry Moody, Ph.D., and David Carroll. The book deals with the enduring cravings of the soul to find meaning and purpose in life. This craving persists even after the individual has achieved his/her material, emotional and career goals.

A Professor of Philosophy, Dr. Moody has had extensive experience in Gerontology. He has spoken and written on the phenomena of aging and the psycho-spiritual fulfillment of life. Perusal of his book is gratifying to those who are engaged in innovative forms of in-depth psychotherapy, where the spiritual aspects of the patients are seriously considered.

In conclusion, the basic premise in alternative psychotherapy, is that deep in the essence of every human being there is a Divine spark, an incorruptible spirit, which is the repository of strength and goodness in that person- a nidus harboring the attributes of love, forgiveness, creativity, generosity, kindness and intuitive wisdom.

The farther removed a person is from that center within him, the more overwhelmed he becomes with the stresses of life leading to depression, neurosis, psychosis and a host of maladaptive maneuvers like alcoholism and substance abuse. It is the task of the therapist to explore with the patient his true self, and discover his capacity to love and be loved, and to give and receive from life what is his legitimate share.

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**Cancer Poem**

So really now, I want to know how much longer do I play the slave to pain that beckons with curled fingers and points to an uncertain grave to anger buried deep inside at this situation I call a living death where each moment is colored by agonizing pulls as I draw another breath

And I have long passed the point of questioning the fairness of my demise Just like I have finished with the fantasy that I can overcome and uprise and beat cancer like I beat child and spousal abuse as well as drug addiction Because I can’t, damn it, no matter what, that’s the fact and not some fiction

So I am left with the question of whether I am really that dense
to continue to struggle with my daily life to save those who sit with me on the fence that their feelings are more important than my own and I’m supposed to slowly slip away. No matter how painful, debilitating or embarrassing it is for me each and every single day.

Call me for a quote.

Medical professional liability policies can vary widely from one company to the next. It is important for psychiatrists to know the full – and accurate – story on a policy. Whether it is reviewing the difference between occurrence and claims-made policies or explaining how another policy might leave the doctor with an uninsured risk, I have done my job when I help psychiatrists evaluate their options to make the right choice.

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**Depression Support Group**

Depression support group meets 2 times a month in Pomona, NY. We are inviting new members at this time. We are moderated by a clinical social worker. This is not a therapy group but social support for people fighting depression. Call Kathy for more information (914) 714-2837.

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**Rockland County Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance**

Peer-to-peer run support group for people with depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder or any related mood disorder & their friends & family. The support group meets every Thursday night from 6:30 - 8:30 at Jawonio, inc. 775 N Main St. New Hempstead. Reservations are not required. There is no fee for attending the support group meetings. This is a very warm and welcoming group run by people who have been there and can help. Any questions please call Leslie or Leonard at 845-837-1182.