# The Notepad



Supporting families dealing with serious mental illness

September 2015, No. 140

# **Public Education Lecture Series** Marijuana: Medicine or Menace?



# **Featuring:**

Dr. Siavash Jafari MD, MHSc, FRCPC, ABAM

Clinical Faculty, Department of Family Medicine, UBC: Burnaby Centre for **Mental Health and Addiction** 

Wednesday, September 30, 2015 **Lions Gate Hospital Auditorium** 7:30 p.m.

Free to attend; no registration required.



#### **How Does Marijuana Impact Mental Health?**

Marijuana has long been promoted by users and advocates as a natural product, one that is safe and nonaddictive, with no side-effects. While public opinion is leaning more favorably toward the legalization of marijuana, current scientific evidence on the effectiveness of cannabinoids for the treatment of certain medical conditions is mixed.

Over 30 international research studies have produced significant findings indicating marijuana can trigger psychosis in those who are predisposed to schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders. In some cases, schizophrenia has also developed spontaneously in individuals who use marijuana and had no prior clue of vulnerability to serious mental illness. This research, and the discussions arising from the studies, have not received as much attention in the mainstream media as stories endorsing potential medical benefits such as chronic pain management.

Joining NSSS at the Public Education Lecture Series on Wednesday, September 30, is Dr. Siavash Jafari, clinical faculty at the UBC Department of Family Medicine and the Burnaby Centre for Mental Health and Addiction. Dr. Jafari will address the following questions:

- What is marijuana?
- How commonly it is used?
- How does it work?
- What are the potential medical uses?
- What are the potential risks and impact on the brain?
- Is it addictive?

Dr. Jafari completed his medical training at the Shiraz University of Medical Sciences in Iran. He practiced as a GP with special focus on addiction until 2004 when he immigrated into Canada. He pursued his Master of Health Sciences in clinical epidemiology and completed his residency training in Public Health and Preventive Medicine at UBC. He has also received training in addiction and mental health through UBC and Vancouver Coastal Health's addiction medicine program.

We hope you'll join us for this informative evening.



# **Greetings**

The summer seems to have flown by and I hope that you all survived the tropical heat we had to endure, only to be plummeted into the depths of Autumn in late August! Welcome to weather in the extreme.

With our energy renewed, we are preparing to deliver the invaluable services that

the Society provides to families, individuals and community members who reach out to us for help and guidance.

As a starting point we have three fully booked Family to Family courses to be delivered in Vancouver, the Tri-Cities and the North Shore. Delivering these courses would be impossible without the commitment of our Family to Family teachers, all of whom are volunteers. We now have some 20 trained teachers committed to delivering this life changing program, for many, across the four regions currently serviced by the NSSS that includes the Sea to Sky Corridor.

If you have taken the course and are interested in teaching, we have an opportunity for you to explore that possibility. We are planning a teacher training session in January 2016. It is a rewarding experience as you get to work directly will families and help them understand and cope with the challenges they face in providing for the needs of their loved one.

The dedication and commitment of our teachers is second to none and we have included in the Notepad a letter to our teachers from Cheryl Zipper and Lisa Stringle who together, provide the training, leadership, support and guidance to our Family to Family teachers.

Our first presentation in our 2015-2016 lecture series is scheduled for September 23 and focuses on the issue of Marijuana and its impact on mental health. Given the continued push for legalization across the country a discussion of the topic is timely as we continue to have concern with incidents of drug induced psychotic episodes. If you have the time please join us for this lecture at the Lions Gate Hospital Auditorium.

The Society held its signature fundraising event in May with some 200 people attending. If you were not able to attend we have included Shirley Chan's story that she passionately shared with those present. Shirley is a mother, volunteer, fundraiser and advocate extraordinaire and her commitment to the Circle of Strength is a huge part of its success. We sincerely thank Shirley for her guidance and Jon McComb, who was our volunteer MC for the second year running, and Adel Bellemlih, Bouygues Building Canada, who sponsored the event.

Adel's commitment has led to him graciously accepting an invitation to join the NSSS Board and we look forward to working with him in that capacity.

While we have new energy on the Board, we would like to bid a fond farewell to Susanna Junnikkala, who has spent the past eight years serving as administrative assistant. Thank you, Susanna, for all your hard work and dedication to the Society and the families we serve, and we wish you well in your future endeavours.

We continue to seek ways to collaborate with those committed to addressing the issues related to serious mental illness and mental health, in general. In support of that we anticipate being involved in a new Vancouver Coastal Heath Sea to Sky (STS) initiative related to Police, Mental Health & Addictions Liaison. We look forward to interacting with other stakeholders regarding STS Corridor Services Coordination.

Thank you to all of our volunteers, those who distribute our posters, help with the Notepad mail out, march in the parades, provide one on one support, teach Family to Family, spread the news, help with the fund raising and the Christmas party. We couldn't do it without you. As we head into the new season we continue to need your committed support. There is always much to do! THANK YOU.

Steve Watt, NSSS President

The North Shore Schizophrenia Society gratefully acknowledges the support of the Province of British Columbia; City of North Vancouver; District of North Vancouver; District of West Vancouver; Resort Municipality of Whistler; Seymour Golf and Country Club; Lynn Valley, Ambleside Tiddlycove, Mt. Seymour, and Capilano Lions Clubs; Vancouver Foundation; West Vancouver Community Foundation, Community Foundation of Whistler; North Shore Rotary Clubs; Lynn Valley Legion; Bouygues Building Canada; Margitta's Flowers; and our many other generous donors.

# Lessons I've Learned About Helping Someone With A Mental Disorder By Pete Earley

une 26, 2015: Five years ago, Pete Earley wrote a blog about the role of families. He has rewritten it today because each week he receives emails from desperate parents asking for help. He is not a professional mental health worker. He is a father and writer. But here are several lessons that he's learned.

#### **Helping Someone Who Has A Mental Illness**

It's difficult helping someone with a mental illness.

When someone becomes physically sick, a family gathers around them. But mental disorders are not like physical ones and families...well, if you want to know how complicated relationships can be consider a recent comment sent to me by a reader. She wrote that her family abandoned her because her parents were tired of having extra "drama" in their lives.

On the other end of the spectrum, I met a couple in lowa who asked if I could help them find their son. He had been diagnosed with schizophrenia and was homeless. Occasionally, he would telephone. While his mother was happy to know that he was alive, he would always end their calls with hurtful rants.

My relationship with my son has not always been easy. Those of you who have read my book know that I was forced to lie about him threatening me in order to get him taken into a hospital rather than put in jail. During a later break, I called the police and my son was shot twice with a Taser. These events can play havoc on father-son relationships.

So what have I learned?

First, mental illnesses are serious business. You can't take an aspirin and wake up in the morning healed. It took more than five years for my son to become stable. Parents and others need to realize that there are no quick fixes. Hang in there and realize there will be many highs and lows on your journey.

**Second, accept a new normal.** Saying you want your child to go back to the way that he was is counterproductive. You need to understand that the person who you love has a mental illness. Most people can and do recover. But the journey that you go through with them to recovery changes both of you. There is no going back to the past.

Third, learn to trust your own judgment. No one

knows the person you love better than you and while there are amazing, devoted and really smart mental health professionals, they do not have to live with the person who is sick.

I've had people tell me that I needed to get tough with Kevin when he was psychotic and not lift a finger to help him until he hit rock bottom. I remember wondering: What does that mean exactly? After all, he was arrested and shot with a Taser? Short of allowing him to go homeless — what's left? Suicide?

Other times, I know my anxiety about pushing him too hard has led to me being an enabler. It helps that Patti is Kevin's step-mom. While she certainly loves him, she sometimes can take a step back and see how Kevin and I are engaging in destructive behaviors that are not good for either of us.

I've turned to professionals for help numerous times and fortunately have gotten good advice. But I've also known some therapists who have no business advising anyone. One actually put Kevin in harm's way because of a rushed diagnosis.

A counselor at the Miami Dade County Jail told me that his sister, who had schizophrenia, had seen more than a dozen doctors and literally hundreds of therapists during her thirty-year struggle. Yet, the family was seen as part of the problem, ignored and often treated rudely. "But who was there when all of those others moved on?" he asked me rhetorically. "In the end, all my sister had was me." You must be resilient. Trust your heart.

Fourth, educate yourself. Think of mental illness as a formable enemy and realize you need to be knowledgeable to prevent it from destroying your loved one's life. Join a national mental health group, such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness or Mental Health America. Learn about Crisis Intervention Team training and if law enforcement in your community has CIT officers who you can call. Become knowledgeable about medications and alternatives. Obtain the tools that you need to help someone you love.

Two sources that have helped me are Dr. Xavier Amador's book, *I'm Not Sick, I Don't Need Help*, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness's Family-to-Family course. One advantage of joining a mental health group is that you meet others on the same road. Learn from them. (Continued on next page...)

Fifth, realize that mental illnesses impact your entire family. Siblings often are jealous of all the attention that is being shown someone with a disorder. They accuse their troubled brother or sister of acting out to get attention or of manipulating their parents. Encouraging them to learn about mental illness and including them in helping someone recover can ease those feelings.

**Sixth, understand your own limitations.** This is perhaps the most difficult lesson to learn. Sometimes, no matter what you do and how hard you try, you will not be successful. If your child had cancer and you couldn't save them, would you blame yourself? A parent can't always fix things. This doesn't mean that you give up, although some do and for good reason.

I remember talking to Bebe Moore Campbell, the late novelist who specialized in writing about mental illnesses, and listening to her explain how she never was critical of anyone who walked away from a family member — including parents. Sometimes, she told me, it was the only way for that person to save themselves. "I've see how these illnesses can destroy relationships," she said.

"No one can judge anyone else until they walk in their shoes."

Seventh, understand that while you love a person who is ill and because of that you hurt, that person is the one with the mental illness and what he/she is going through can be more horrific than what most of us will ever imagine. Learn to listen, treat them with respect, try to build trust and when possible, become a partner — make sure they are part of the solution and not seen as a problem that needs to be fixed.

So what's the answer? There is no singular one. Every person is unique, every family is different, every mental break brings with it challenges. What I have learned is that for me, ultimately, I must have hope. I must believe that recovery is possible. I must believe because without hope, I know recovery will never happen.

You have to believe that a better day is coming tomorrow.  $\hfill\Box$ 

Note: This article is reprinted with the author's permission; source: www.peteearley.com.

# Dr. Bill Honer, on Brain Plasticity and Everyday Life



Overwhelming research in the last 20 years has revealed that the brain never stops changing and adjusting. This capacity is called plasticity. In the case of brain illness or injury, plasticity plays a fundamental role in a person's recovery.

To explain more about brain plasticity, Dr. Bill Honer, head of UBC's Department of Psychiatry and the Jack Bell Chair

in Schizophrenia, spoke to a large crowd at the last Public Education Lecture Series, on Wednesday, May 27, in the Lions Gate Hospital Auditorium.

Recently Dr. Honer and an international team of researchers have been studying the effects that aerobic exercise and yoga have on the cognitive functioning and clinical symptoms of schizophrenia patients with early psychosis.

Brain scans before and after exercise shows an enlargement of the hippocampus, suggesting brain tissues could regenerate as a result of this intervention, rather than be lost to the illness. While aerobic fitness is often

low in people with schizophrenia, with proper supports, they can be encouraged to participate. The improvement in symptoms and cognitive function is now an active area of research.

Dr. Honer concluded that our older ideas about brain chemistry and dopamine are still important in understanding how the medications we have work, and prevent relapses. New ideas emerging from current research focus on the brain's active ability to change.

Over time, he predicts researchers may be able to develop medicates to help speed these changes. He also believes changes in lifestyle such as aerobic exercise, yoga, and perhaps music can also make a real difference for patients.  $\Box$ 

#### View Dr. Honer's Presentation on YouTube

NSSS would especially like to thank Jorge Parra, of Underdog Productions, for filming Dr. Honer's presentation.

To view it on YouTube, please follow the link on our website, www.northshoreschizophrenia.org, found on the homepage under *What's New?*.

## Family-to-Family Classes in Winter 2016

With the September Family-to-Family classes underway on the North Shore and in Vancouver and Tri-Cities, NSSS is now preparing for the January sessions:

North Shore: January 26—April 12, 2016 Vancouver: February 2—April 19, 2016 Tri-Cities: February 2—April 19, 2016

Classes are held on 12 consecutive Tuesdays, from 7-9:30 p.m.

"So many lights went on for me," wrote a past participant.

"Realizing what my ill relative is going through was an AHA! Moment for me."

For more information and to register, please contact Melanie at the Family Support Centre: melnie@northshoreschizophrenia.org or 604-926-0856.



Lisa Stringle and Cheryl Zipper, Family-to-Family coordinators and teacher-trainers.

### Train to Become a Family-to-Family Teacher

From January 15 –17, we will be hosting Family-to-Family Teacher Training, not only for our North Shore families, but for families throughout the Lower Mainland.

Find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world, as the quotation says (right), and please consider joining us for a weekend teacher-training session.

You must have taken the Family-to-Family course in order to register for the teacher training.

Please call the Family Support Centre at 604-926-0856 for more information and to register.

"When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all of your thoughts break their bonds: Your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person than you even dreamed yourself to be."

- Patamkali, Indian Philosopher, from *Chicken Soup for the Volunteer's Soul* 

# **Teacher Talk** Newsletter Helps Support Family-to-Family Teachers

The Family-to-Family education program has grown considerably over the past two years, with classes now offered in four locations each year throughout the Lower Mainland. To help keep teachers informed and connected, Cheryl Zipper and Lisa Stringle, Family-to-Family co-coordinators and teacher-trainers, launched the NSSS Family-to-Family Teacher Talk newsletter in August. The newsletter will be produced six times a year, based around the class schedules.

Even if teachers are not teaching the current class, the newsletter is a great way to keep everyone up-to-date on what's happening. Besides offering news and events information, *Teacher-Talk* also features handy tips, such as how to handle difficult questions from participants, and inspiring quotations from past graduates that

gets to the heart of why Family-to-Family is such a vital program for families of those with mental illness.

If you are a Family-to-Family teacher, Cheryl and Lisa welcome your submissions. Their contact information is included in each newsletter.

#### From Volunteer Teacher to Teacher-Trainer

NSSS Family-to-Family co-coordinator and teacher, Lisa Stringle, travelled to Washington, DC, on behalf of NSSS in April 2015, to become a Family-to-Family teacher-trainer. The annual three-day training course was provided by the National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI), the organization that developed the course.

Lisa joins NSSS Family-to-Family co-coordinator Cheryl Zipper as a certified teacher-trainer in B.C.

## Finding Hope, Having Courage: Mothers and Daughters Film Debuts



ne of the highlights of the 7th annual Circle of Strength fundraiser, in May, was the debut of a short film, *Mothers and Daughters*, featuring NSSS volunteers Milena Nordwall and Crystal Collison (third and fourth from left) and June and Janet Scott (far right).

Many thanks to these courageous mothers and daughters for sharing their personal experiences with mental illness. We also say thank-you to Herschel and Marguerite Hardin (far left) for producing the film, and to Elton

Hubner, of eyes multimedia, for volunteering his technical know-how, equipment, and time to make the film a reality.

Also pictured above is NSSS executive director, Nancy Ford (third from right).

To view *Mothers and Daughters*, please visit www.northshoreschizophrenia.org and click on the link, under *What's New?*, on the main page. □

## Saying Goodbye—Two Fond Farewells



After eight years of serving families as the NSSS administrative assistant, Susanna Junnikkala is moving on to new projects. We hope to see her at the Christmas party and Circle of Strength, two major events she helped organize during her time at NSSS.

brate Susanna and her contribution to families and to the Society. **NSSS will hold an open house on** 

Please join us as we cele-

#### **Family Support Centre**

205 - 1865 Marine Drive West Vancouver BC V7V 1J7 Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. or by appointment

604-926-0856

www.northshoreschizophrenia.org

info@northshoreschizophrenia.org

Twitter: @NSSSoc

Wednesday, September 23, from 4-6:30 p.m., at the Family Support Centre. All are welcome.



NSSS is also bidding farewell to Chris Dickinson, Whistler outreach coordinator. During his time with NSSS, Chris helped raise awareness of serious mental illness in the community and connected many families to the local-area support group. We would like to thank Chris for his dedication to

families and wish him the best in his future work.

#### **Monthly Support Meetings**

Come share your questions, concerns, and experiences with family members.

Support group meetings are held each month in West Vancouver, Squamish, Whistler, and Tri-Cities for family members and close friends of people who have serious mental illnesses.

For information, please call 604-926-0856.

# My Family's Story By Shirley Chan

Shirley Chan shared her story at the Circle of Strength fundraising event this past May. She is an NSSS member, volunteer, Family-to-Family teacher, and co-chair of the fundraising team. With Shirley's permission, we wanted to share her story:

When our daughter, Emma, fell ill, it took my husband and me almost 10 years to realize the behaviour we were experiencing was more than just teenage rebellion. Our bright, socially responsible, emotionally wise daughter dropped out of school at 16, failed to get a job and keep it, lost her friends, and spent too much time in front of the TV. When told to get her life back on track, return to school or get a job, she swore at her dad who, in dismay and at his wit's end, kicked her out. I was at work at the time. Emma was 19.

Eventually, she re-established contact with us. She remained independent until we were called to St. Paul's Hospital following a suicide attempt. Learning my daughter had tried to take her own life was gutwrenching. I was <u>terrified</u> we were going to lose her. Confused. "What have we done wrong?" I kept asking myself. What could we do, I desperately wanted to know. But when she was discharged from hospital, we were given no information, and she was not referred to any counselling or support.

Emma began a cycle of getting but not retaining employment and had problems with a personal relationship. She set goals, took training, received certifications, but failed to achieve her employment goals and independence. She was often agitated and hostile. She had trouble with co-workers and got fired. She accused me of abuse. We consulted our family physician for a referral for psychiatric assessment. After a long wait, she went alone to an appointment with a psychiatrist, and reported back that she was fine. We were told nothing. She was an adult and entitled to privacy. We became increasingly concerned as her behaviour grew more and more bizarre.

Then one day my neighbour approached me to say she had seen Emma walking down the street singing loudly and behaving like her nephew, who was ill with schizophrenia. She suggested I contact the North Shore Schizophrenia Society. She had attended a Circle of Strength luncheon in the spring, where she had learned how NSSS supports families of persons with mental illness.

I looked up NSSS on the internet and discovered I knew the president. I registered for the Family-to-Family education course which was beginning in just two weeks. Thankfully, they made room for us even though we lived in Vancouver and did not have a diagnosis for our daughter.

What a difference it made to have NSSS on our side! We went from a place of denial and confusion, with nowhere to turn, to one of strength and knowledge about what was happening to our daughter and ourselves and knowledge about the mental health system. We met other people with similar problems, people who had been through what we had been through. It wasn't a straight or smooth transition. We still went through periods of denial and despair, but we became emotionally grounded.

Emma has been hospitalized three times since we finished the Family-to-Family course in 2012, once while we were taking the course. She has full-scale hallucinated. Her diagnosis is "unspecified psychotic disorder," a sort of non-diagnosis, but it's pretty clear to me it's schizophrenia. This, however, isn't the end of the story. She has made tremendous progress since 2012-2013 when she was most seriously ill. Now she is generally stable when taking her medication regularly.

Because of NSSS, we knew what symptoms of illness to watch for, how to talk with police and hospital staff, and were able to get her admitted and treated in short order instead of floundering as we did in the past.

To sum it all up: With support from NSSS, we gained the strength and know-how to help our daughter. Emma still wants to live independently, and we are optimistic that will be possible when her name comes up on the housing wait-list. But wherever she goes, we are in a better position to give her the support and help she needs, thanks to the Society.  $\square$ 

#### **Your Financial Contribution**

Thank you to our many friends and supporters. Your donations and membership are appreciated. Tax receipts are issued for all contributions.

## **Spring and Summer 2015 Events Recap**





#### Circle of Strength

The 7th annual Circle of Strength fundraiser was held Saturday, May 30, at the Hollyburn Country Club in West Vancouver. Sponsored by Bouygues Building Canada and hosted by CKNW's Jon McComb, the successful event will help support NSSS programs. **Pictured:** (top left) Adel Bellemlih (sponsor), NSSS executive director Nancy Ford, and NSSS president Steve Watt; (top right) volunteers Janet Scott, June Scott, and fundraising co-chair Shirley Chan; (right) NSSS support coordinator Marguerite Hardin, Master of Ceremonies Jon McComb, and NSSS board member Gill Santo.



Photo credits: North Shore News (above); John Nixon (below)

# North Shan Schi: Schi: Schizophreia Society

#### Parade Season

Many thanks to all the families who helped raise awareness of serious mental illness by participating in the West Vancouver Community Day Parade, on June 6, and the North Shore Canada Day Parade, on July 1. We appreciate your enthusiasm, involvement, and support. Pictured is Philip Wright (right), who designed a special celebratory costume for Canada Day, and Herschel Hardin, NSSS advocacy coordinator.

### Looking Ahead: Christmas! Volunteer with NSSS.

It may only be September, but we're already preparing for our annual Christmas Banquet, to be held Saturday, December 5, at St. David's United Church, West Vancouver. In October and November, we would appreciate help shopping for small gifts and wrapping presents. We will also need volunteers before, during, and after the party on December 5 to drive guests to and from the venue, set up, decorate, serve, clear tables, and clean up.

If you would like to get involved with our biggest gathering of the year, please contact us at info@northshoreschizophrenia.org or 604-926-0856.