



National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations

It's been another great year for the NCMHCSO!
Some of our 2009 accomplishments include:

- Congress is listening to NCMHCSO. In March 2009, Congress signed into law \$960,000 to increase funding for consumer statewide networks, which will allow 12 additional consumer-run networks to receive grants in the amount of \$70,000 per year for 3 years.
- Hired Tom Bryant M.D., J.D., as our Director of Government Relations. Tom comes to us with impeccable credentials including serving in the Carter Administration as the Chairman of the President's Commission on Mental Health, which was co-chaired by First Lady Rosalynn Carter. He has spent 30 years as a member of the Carter Center's Mental Health Task Force, and many years working on the Hill.
- Developed Emotional CPR (eCPR). The excitement is building for this public health education program that trains lay people to assist someone through an emotional crisis. eCPR is a heart-to-heart emotional resuscitation based on peer support principles. Certification in eCPR is planned for 2010. An eCPR Law Enforcement Version has been developed and may be used as an alternative to or component of CIT training.
- Participated in a several White House briefings and policy meetings with senior advisors to the President, and we were present for President Obama's invitation-only historic signing of the commitment to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Co-sponsored a standing room only Senate briefing on "The Cost Savings of Reducing Health Disparities in Health Reform".
- Centrally involved in forming the Justice for All Action Network (JFAAN), a national cross-disability coalition and we have one of the 12 seats on the steering committee which is comprised of national organizations run by people with disabilities. Working with JFAAN we are in the very early stages of developing statewide cross-disability coalitions lead by persons with disabilities.
- Played an active role in planning and presenting at the International Association of Chiefs of Police National Policy Summit on **Building Safe Communities: Improving Police Response to Persons with Mental Illness** which will result in specific recommendations sent to 12,000 police departments for implementation.
- Conducted three meetings with senior Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services staff to develop collaborative strategies to further expand consumer-driven services and flexible Medicaid waivers that promote self-determined care.
- Continued to develop relationships with the media. Our media presence has included five press releases, Lauren Spiro's participation as a panelist in a 1-hour television show, "Minds on the Edge: Facing Mental Illness," and Bonnie Neighbour of VOCAL, our Virginia member was interviewed and reported on via CNN.
- Created a manual entitled "Speaking From the Heart: Changing Lives, Changing Communities." This step-by-step guide to public speaking is based on lessons learned from the mental health consumer/survivor movement. It was also presented as a web-cast in July 2009.

SELECTION OF 2008-9 PRESS RELEASES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Lauren Spiro, M.A., Director
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Consumer/Survivor Coalition Calls for Voluntary, Peer-run Alternatives to Force and Coercion in Mental Health Treatment

WASHINGTON, DC (10/6/09) – Lauren Spiro, director of the National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations (NCMHCSO), which represents individuals with psychiatric histories, will promote self-determination and community integration through peer-run alternatives to involuntary mental health treatment at a Capitol Hill briefing entitled “Facing Mental Illness: Policy Lessons from Minds on the Edge” on Wednesday, October 7, 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m., at the Reserve Officers Association, 1 Constitution Ave., NE, Washington, DC. To read the NCMHCSO position statement, click here: <http://www.ncmhcsso.org/policy/AlternativesToForce.pdf>.

Ms. Spiro was a *Minds on the Edge* panelist, and had hoped to share NCMHCSO’s vision of recovery-oriented, consumer- and family-driven systems of care, as called for in the 2003 report of the President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. Upon seeing that this recovery orientation was not included, Spiro wrote to the producers (click <http://ncmhcsso.org/communication.htm> for the letter) to express her disappointment that the pro-force-and-coercion perspective was given disproportionate representation during the taping, and expressing her hope that the final version of the program would address this imbalance. Unfortunately the final version perpetuates the myth that persons with mental health issues cannot make their own decisions.

Daniel Fisher, M.D., Ph.D., a member of the President’s New Freedom Commission and the NCMHCSO Steering Committee, noted: “Research indicates that forced psychiatric treatments are usually traumatic, resulting in people becoming fearful of seeking help. NCMHCSO calls on Congress to fund evidence-based, recovery-oriented, cost-effective, voluntary, peer-run crisis respites. These respites are based on the values of trust, choice, and person-driven treatment planning.”

“In order to have a balanced dialogue, the public needs to know that people recover through self-determination and trusting relationships, rather than by force and coercion,” said Spiro. “Such dialogue would generate widespread support for transforming the system to better meet people’s real needs.”

For information about mental health peer-operated crisis alternatives, visit <http://www.power2u.org/peer-run-crisis-alternatives.html>.

The mission of the National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations (NCMHCSO) is to ensure that consumer/survivors have a major voice in the development and implementation of health care, mental health, and social policies at the state and national levels, empowering people to recover and lead a full life in the community.

Press Release

For Immediate Release

National Coalition of People with Psychiatric Histories Mourns the Death of Sen. Edward M. Kennedy

WASHINGTON (8/26/09) – The National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations (NCMHCSO) deeply mourns the death of Senator Edward M. Kennedy, an ardent and lifelong champion of the rights of people with disabilities and of all Americans.

“Sen. Kennedy understood to his very core the importance of involving all Americans – including people who are homeless, people living in poverty, people with physical and/or psychiatric disabilities, people in pain, people struggling for a better life – in the American community,” said Lauren Spiro, director of the Coalition. “Sen. Kennedy and his staff have worked diligently with the Coalition to further our mission and strengthen our voice. We echo the words of President Obama, who said, ‘Our country has lost a great leader, who picked up the torch of his fallen brothers and became the greatest United States senator of our time.’”

“Senator Kennedy devoted his career to expanding health coverage to as many Americans as possible. A fitting memorial to the Senator would be the passage of comprehensive health care reform as soon as possible,” Spiro said.

“The National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations offers our deepest sympathy to Senator Kennedy’s family at this sad time.”

The National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations works to ensure that people who have experienced severe emotional distress have a major voice in the development and implementation of health care, mental health, and social policies at the state and national levels. The Coalition advocates for mental health policies that promote full participation and integration in the community and end discrimination.

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations Hires Director of Government Relations

Dr. Thomas Bryant Brings Hill Experience, Commitment to Consumer/Survivor Empowerment

WASHINGTON, DC (7/15/09) – The National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations is pleased to announce the hiring of Thomas Bryant, MD, JD, as its first-ever Director of Government Relations. Dr. Bryant, a longtime leader in the mental health field, states: “I’m excited to join the staff of the National Coalition. The most important innovations in the mental health field come from consumer/survivors and it is time for us to take our rightful place at the head table, where decisions are made.”

Bryant has a distinguished career in public service and identifies publicly as a person with lived experience of mental health challenges and recovery. Throughout his career he has had extensive interaction with members of Congress and their staffs. Under President Johnson, he served as the Director of Health Affairs at the Office of Economic Opportunity. In the Carter Administration he served as the Chairman of the President's Commission on Mental Health, which was co-chaired by First Lady Rosalynn Carter. He has spent 30 years as a member of the Carter Center’s Mental Health Task Force.

He founded the Public Committee on Mental Health and formed the Friends of the National Library of Medicine with former Congressman Paul Rogers. He formed the National Foundation for Mental Health, which advocates for mental health research funding.

He has worked for the Ford Foundation, and is the founder of the National Drug Abuse Council. Prior to accepting the position with the National Coalition, he was employed at the New York law firm of Webster and Sheffield, for which he opened a Washington, DC, office. He has both a law degree and a medical degree from Emory University.

Bryant will work closely with Lauren Spiro, Director of the National Coalition. Says Spiro, "Thomas Bryant is a terrific addition to our staff. With his knowledge of Capitol Hill and passion to advance the mission of the National Coalition, we will have a more visible and powerful impact in shaping the public policies that affect us."

For more information, call the National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations, 877-246-9058, or email info@ncmhcsso.org.

PRESS RELEASE

Tragedies Underscore Crisis in U.S. Public Mental Health System: National Advocacy Organization Demands Reforms

WASHINGTON, Dec. 2, 2008 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- In the wake of the deaths of two persons in public psychiatric institutions - highlighting a pattern of abuse and neglect of those who have psychiatric disabilities - a national coalition of such individuals is calling on the incoming Obama administration and the nation's top mental health officials to institute widespread, substantive reforms in America's mental health treatment system. These would include raising standards and regulatory expectations, and identifying and funding pilot programs to demonstrate best practices in psychiatric emergency, inpatient and community-based care.

The death of Steven Sabock, a 50-year-old man diagnosed with bipolar disorder who died on April 29 in a North Carolina state psychiatric institution after he had choked on medication - while, nearby, hospital employees, ignoring his plight, entertained themselves with cards and TV - is just one example of the dangerous dysfunction of the public mental health system, said Dan Fisher, M.D., Ph.D., of the National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations (NCMHCSO).

"The death of Steven Sabock at Cherry Hospital in Goldsboro, N.C., which made headlines last week, is only one tragedy in the tragic history of the American public mental health system - a system that the 2003 report of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health described as 'in shambles,'" said Fisher, a Commission member. "The Obama administration should reconstitute the Commission with a focus on specific outcomes, such as improving psychiatric emergency care."

After Sabock's death, three hospital employees were dismissed and five others were suspended for less than a week. However, no one has been criminally charged.

Sabock's death is not an isolated incident. In June 2008, Esmine Green, who had been involuntarily committed, collapsed in the psychiatric emergency room of New York City's Kings County Hospital Center after having waited for a bed for nearly 24 hours. She lay sprawled on the floor for more than an hour before the medical staff took any notice - and that notice consisted of someone's prodding her dead body with a foot, according to The New York Times.

Shortly thereafter, the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS) convened a series of regional Psychiatric Emergency Care Forums across the state, bringing together local hospitals, local and state mental health officials, peers (people with psychiatric disabilities), service providers and family members.

The forums have yielded many promising recommendations, including expanding low-cost alternatives to psychiatric emergency rooms such as peer-run warm lines and crisis respite care, improving staff response via training and higher standards, reforming federal and state certification and regulatory standards, expanding access to community mental health services beyond normal business hours, enhancing police training in crisis de-escalation and other strategies, and preparing peers to better anticipate and manage crises via training and support for the development of personal crisis/safety plans.

"These tragedies underscore the great crisis that exists in our nation's mental health care systems. While the challenge to overhaul them is daunting, we know much more today than in the past about what needs to be done," said Harvey Rosenthal, executive director of NYAPRS, a NCMHCSO member organization. "We're calling on the incoming Obama administration to recommit federal mental health reform efforts that incorporate and implement recommendations from untapped experts, people living with psychiatric disabilities like us."

The National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations (<http://www.ncmhcsso.org>) works to ensure that people diagnosed with mental illnesses have a major voice in the development and implementation of health care, mental health, and social policies at the state and national levels, empowering people to recover and lead a full life in the community. The coalition currently consists of statewide organizations run by people with psychiatric histories in 32 states, including the District of Columbia, as well as the three federally funded consumer-run national technical assistance centers.

The New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (<http://www.nyaprs.org>) is dedicated to improving services and social conditions for people with psychiatric disabilities by promoting their recovery, rehabilitation and rights.

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National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations

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