

NEWSLETTER

Christmas 2010

THAT WAS THE YEAR....

As I scribble my last editorial of 2010, I feel that the year has been quite a good one. The group has welcomed some good speakers at St Matthews and it is pleasing that the Hilltop support meetings attract a regular attendance. The latter is especially encouraging as our numbers were a bit low a few months back. Personally I'm very happy about how this newsletter is doing: I get a steady trickle of very nice emails! That's a tribute to the quality of the writing that I can extract from members, speakers and our regular columnist Dr Hunt. Thank you all very much for keeping my job an interesting one.

IN THIS ISSUE

Dr Hunt often comes to talk to us at St Matthews. We know we will get an interesting and very informative presentation, followed by plenty of detailed answers to all our questions. His visit in October had a very large audience, 35 in all, many having come from other MDF groups and elsewhere. He had come to talk about the diagnosis and course of bipolar disorder, but encouraged a more or less continuous question and answer session.

A lot of ground was covered, ranging from parents' difficulties in spotting truly unusual behaviour in their offspring through to the role of GPs and the improvement of their knowledge of bipolar disorder. As usual, I am grateful to Dr Hunt for his related article.

The innovatory Peer Support Worker project continues apace. The project manager Sharon Gilfoyle gave a talk at St Matthews earlier in the year. One of our own members, Mandy has now completed both the demanding training course and the personal journey that this involved. Her article makes very interesting reading.



Seasonal Best Wishes to All Our Readers

JANUARY 10th - TALK AT ST MATTHEWS

I must remind you that our next talk at St Matthews is coming up very soon! We will once again be very pleased to welcome Clare Mundell to start our year. A good friend to the Group, Clare is the chief pharmacist with our local mental health trust. She always tells us a bit about the latest research and is then happy to take our questions.

We can expect an enjoyable evening. That's 7.30 for an 8.00pm start. All other details are on the back page.

ASK THE DOCTOR – ‘Live’ at St Matthews

I was very pleased to take part in the October meeting with a group twice as large as expected. Many people shared their experience, either personal or experience in their family. It was not always easy to stick to the topic which was about the diagnosis and course of bipolar disorder.

We heard from the parents of someone with bipolar disorder how they had struggled to understand and get help with their teenage son whose behaviour had changed. Distinguishing bipolar symptoms from other teenage behaviours was very difficult at the time but only became clear when looking back. Teenage years are a common time for bipolar disorder to start, the aspects that can be useful to recognise are the episodic nature of the illness and the two poles both mania and depression each of which are usually persistent for a few weeks at least. But when you know little about bipolar illness then it is difficult to know what to look for!

Drugs and alcohol also muddied the water for making a diagnosis for many people and still do for some. Many people with bipolar have anxiety problems and using alcohol can ease this in the short term but make it worse in the long term. It is much harder for anyone including doctors to recognise bipolar disorder when erratic behaviour is associated with drugs and alcohol.

Parents struggle with confidentiality barriers. Mental health staff should usually be able to listen to information from others about patients even if they cannot say much if the patient refuses. It might be a good idea to say to the doctor ‘I know you can’t tell me anything but I want you to know what I am worried about – and I will tell my son/daughter what I have said to you’.

GPs get a very mixed press – some are very valued for their long term commitment to a patient – others are very criticised for not recognising early what is happening. It is always worth going back and being as clear as you can about what is worrying you but recognising the limited time they have at any one appointment. They have to know something about everything and that is a big challenge! You can also ask for a second opinion – just as you can from another psychiatrist. Most doctors don’t mind too much and don’t take it as an affront – because we may be finding the diagnosis and treatment difficult too and would value some help. Before you ask make sure you know as clearly as possible what they think – get them to write it down if you need to and consider seriously the possibility that they may be right!

Several people had suffered from psychosis – losing touch with reality in a severe illness. This is much more common in bipolar illness than in other forms of depression and should always alert you to the possibility of a bipolar diagnosis.

One person talked about including people with bipolar disorder in teaching students. Many people treated in Cambridge have probably been asked to talk to students at times. It might be a good idea to let them know that they could come to one of your meetings – would you be willing?*

After all unless the experts are willing to teach them you can’t complain if doctors seem uneducated about this important illness!

Dr Neil Hunt

[* Ed: Any such invitation to medical students would be to attend one of our meetings at St Matthews. Meetings at Hilltop provide a mutually supportive environment that is strictly for members only. The idea has now been raised of a separate group for medical students and interested MDF Group members to have their own meetings. If you’d be interested in getting involved, please contact medical student Alan Kershaw, ack35@cam.ac.uk]

TRAINING FOR PEER SUPPORT WORK

In August I did the Peer Support Worker training course and graduated successfully. The PSW role is specifically for people who have lived experience of mental distress and who have used secondary mental health services. Through sharing their own experiences they will inspire hope and optimism, empathy, mutuality, and friendship.

The idea behind peer support came from Recovery Innovations of Arizona. This is that people with a lived experience of psychiatric challenges work in a role that is somewhat like a mentor/support worker to help people into a place of recovery. Think of some of the different supports we get from groups like our own and perhaps friends or family who know what it is like to experience similar challenges. I myself have found that using groups such as MDF and Lifecraft gave me a very different kind of help than the professionals.

The Peer Support Worker project is new for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the NHS Foundation Trust is fully behind it and are funding posts for the peer worker role. To do this course you must be committed to applying for a peer support role; attending the training does not guarantee a post.

I went to the orientation day and there was a group I attended before the course to help me produce my own Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP). The application process was slow and thorough. I then had an interview for the training course, which is an in-depth full time training course of one month. I attended the fourth cohort of training in Cambridge, which was led by the new trainee Peer Educators under the guidance of Terrence Smithers and Chris Martin from Recovery Innovations.

This is a challenging course: they are hoping to have it accredited to the OU in the future. This was the first studying I have done since university and it gave me an opportunity to use my brain in a way that has been neglected for ten years. The course was fascinating: it taught a very different approach to helping people with their recovery and also gave me new tools to help my own recovery. There was a focus on communication, conflict resolution, personality types, supporting people with a history of trauma and recovery from substances. I met some wonderful people and really got to know them. Everything we did was supportive, caring and really positive; I can honestly say it is one of best things I have done recently.

The course involved extensive reading of the course material every day, one mid term take-home exam and a small test at the end. Half way through the course we all told our own stories of our life and psychiatric challenges. This was an entire day where everyone told their own story from a new perspective that inspires and provides hope.

There was also a period of work experience we all had to take part in. Mine was undertaken on the learning disability inpatient ward. I had some very inspiring and positive moments there and was able to share my own lived experience of psychiatric challenges in a way that was meaningful and most importantly I got to know some wonderful people: staff and peers alike. This was a real opportunity to see the rewards that this role would have for me and for others doing the training. I had some fun being involved in the activities; one of the highlights being the bingo we played.

On completing the course we had a graduation ceremony at which we all had to give a speech - a sort of shorter version of our stories - and say something about what the course meant to us. I was nervous, didn't plan much but gave a speech about autism and psychiatric challenges along the lines of the National Autistic Society's "I Exist" campaign.

During all this excitement and learning we all had a deadline to make the application for the posts that were available at the time and we had a recruitment day where managers gave an introduction to their own areas of work. After the course ended I had an interview for the Peer Support Worker role which went really well and I have been offered a conditional post on a team in CPFT. At the time of writing I am waiting on clearance from Occupational Health before I can start the job.

There will be further training cohorts in the New Year. For more information contact Cheril Barks.
Email: cheril.barks@cpft.nhs.uk Tel: 01733 748394

Mandy

USEFUL SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Lifecraft

Based at The Bath House on Gwydir Street. Self-help organization led by those who have experienced mental illness. Membership is open to all who have had, or still have mental health difficulties. Provides wide range of group activities, support, counselling and more at The Bath House.

Comprehensive website at: www.lifecraft.org.uk

For mental health info/advice, plus Lifecraft details call 01223 566957. Monday to Friday, 1-4pm

Lifeline

Freephone 0808 808 2121. 7-11pm, 365 days a year.

Lifecraft's mental health support line. Confidential and manned by experienced volunteers.

Making Space

Support, information and advice to the carers and families of people with mental health issues.

At a national scale, Making Space provides a wide range of support but in Cambridgeshire it concentrates solely on serving the needs of carers. Carer Support Workers help both carer and sufferer to access the services they may need. They can also give emotional support to a carer, or simply be there to talk with.

Tel: 01480 432504 Email: cambridgeshirecarersupport.service@makingspace.co.uk

Cam-mind

Cambridge's oldest mental health charity. Affiliated to national Mind. Helps mental health service users along the road to recovery. Range of community groups and social activities. One-on-one befriending. Supported housing. County-wide floating support.

Barrere House, 100 Chesterton Road, Cambridge
Telephone: 01223 311320
Email: admin@cam-mind.org.uk

Very helpful website at: www.cam-mind.org.uk



CAMBRIDGE

MDF BIPOLAR

SELF HELP GROUP

MEETINGS

Remember that not all meetings now are exactly on second or fourth Mondays so check dates carefully. Up-to-date info is always on the website and we can email reminders to those of you who so choose. There are also links to maps on our website or just ask and we can send one.

LIFTS – Lifts may be available if you're stuck for getting to a meeting. Let us know if you're in need.

Support Group Meetings at Hilltop, Primrose Street, Cambridge CB4 3EH

We have small groups. Hilltop car park is very near the end of Greens Road, down a little slope. Come for refreshments at 7.30pm for a 7.45pm start.

The first four meetings in 2011 will be on January 24th, February 28th, March 28th and April 18th

Meetings at St Matthew's Parish Hall, St Matthew's Road, Cambridge CB1 2LT

There is usually a guest speaker or group discussion on a relevant topic. There is street parking around the area but watch out for double yellow lines and residents' bays in some places. Come for refreshments and informal chat at 7.30pm for an 8pm start.

Monday January 10th 2011 – Chief Pharmacist Clare Mundell. An informed and popular speaker with our group, Clare will be bringing us her latest news. As usual, she will be happy to answer our questions.

Monday April 11th – To be announced.

CAMBRIDGE MDF BIPOLAR SELF-HELP GROUP ~ CONTACT DETAILS

*You can telephone: **08456 340 540** or **0207 793 2600**. These numbers go to the national MDF The BiPolar Organisation offices in London. They will tell callers about our group and pass messages on to us if necessary.*

Please send any correspondence to us:

c/o Threeways, 14 Home End, Fulbourn, Cambridge CB21 5BS

Website: www.mdfcambridge.org.uk Group Email: [mdf\(AT\)mdfcambridge.org.uk](mailto:mdf(AT)mdfcambridge.org.uk)

Emails can also be forwarded to the following. Replace '(AT)' in the addresses with '@' (It's to reduce spam):

Jackie: [jackie\(AT\)mdfcambridge.org.uk](mailto:jackie(AT)mdfcambridge.org.uk) - especially about meetings and activities

Edward: [edward\(AT\)mdfcambridge.org.uk](mailto:edward(AT)mdfcambridge.org.uk) – especially about mailing lists, website and lifts.

Jon: [jon\(AT\)mdfcambridge.org.uk](mailto:jon(AT)mdfcambridge.org.uk) - especially about the newsletter.

Phil: [phil\(AT\)mdfcambridge.org.uk](mailto:phil(AT)mdfcambridge.org.uk)

We are a local group of **MDF The Bipolar Organisation**, Castle Works, 21 St George's Road, London SE1 6ES
Tel: 08456 340 540. Fax 020 7793 2639. Email: [mdf\(AT\)mdf.org.uk](mailto:mdf(AT)mdf.org.uk) Registered Charity Number 293340