May is Mental Health Awareness Month
What's happening?

Healthy Coping Skills during COVID-19
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President’s Comments

Kay Jewell, MD, President, Board of Directors

Hi Everyone. It seems a long time since we last talked! So much has changed – and so much stays the same. First – I want to thank everyone who joined us for the first online Annual Meeting on April 18th. It was a small but enthusiastic gathering – sharing concerns and ideas for the future and discovering it worked pretty well to meet online. Both bylaw changes passed and we have 6 elected board members (We’ll introduce the board and officers in the next issue).

Second, I want to congratulate Barron on its recent geographic expansion. They will now serve 6 counties, well to meet online. Both bylaw changes passed and we have 6 elected board members (We’ll introduce the board and officers in the next issue).

Many of our affiliates around the state have been modifying their support groups to comply with social distancing and safer at home measures. Call or email your local affiliate to see if they are currently hosting online support groups.

To find your local NAMI affiliate, call us at (608) 268-6000 or visit our website namiwisconsin.org/find-your-local-nami.

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Need Someone to Talk to?

Hopeline: Text ‘HOPELINE’ to 741741
Iris Place (warmline): (920) 815-3217
Monarch House: (715) 505-5641

Contact NAMI Wisconsin

(608) 268-6000
nami@namiwisconsin.org
www.namiwisconsin.org

Mark Your Calendars!

NAMI Wisconsin
2020 Notable Dates
May 7 Action on the Square
September 29 & 30 Annual Conference
Oct 3 Healing Art Show
Oct 4 – 10 Mental Illness Awareness Week

OUR MISSION

The mission of NAMI Wisconsin is to improve the quality of life of people affected by mental illness and to promote recovery.
Jin Shin Jyutsu (JSJ), was brought to the US from Japan by Mary Burmeister in the 1950’s. She studied with Master Jiro Murai, who was the researcher, student of ancient Eastern medicine, philosophy, and teacher of the art of JSJ. JSJ is the cosmic artless art “to know/help myself.” We could spend years unlocking the beauty of JSJ but it is simply a gentle form of acupressure therapy to release tensions causing various symptoms in the body.

This technique is used to help anxiety, anger, grief, relax, built-up energy/tension, or when having any emotion or sensation that is troubling.

To practice this technique, hold each finger, one at a time, and connect it with three deep breaths. After completing all fingers, use the middle finger and thumb to apply pressure to each side of the palm of the opposite hand for three deep breaths. Then move to the opposite hand.

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Meet Our New CIT/CIP Director

Helyn Luisi-Mills, CIT/CIP Director

Hi all, I am excited to join the NAMI Wisconsin team and look forward to working with you. I was born in Caracas, Venezuela, immigrat-ed to the United States in 1986, and grew up in Miami, Florida. I moved to Madison, Wisconsin for an internship for a conference in a rock band and toured the coun-try culminating in performing at a conference with 18,000 university students.

I received a B.A. from the University of Central Florida in communica-tions and an M.S. in Human Ecol-ogy from University of Wisconsin, Madison. From 2004 to 2006 my husband, Peter, and I served in Bangladesh with the Peace Corps. After the peace corps I worked in a non-profit directring international programs for university students to intern with NGOs around the world. Before I started here with NAMI Wisconsin I worked at the Road Home Dane County as a bilingual housing specialist. I partnered with families to access support services as they transitioned out of home-lessness or were at risk of becom-ing homeless. I am also a certified peer specialist with mental health lived experience.

During my time in the Peace Corps I learned that the one thing I could never give up are arepas (a Venezuelan corn meal patty the ultimate comfort food). Fortunately, I was regularly blessed by care packages from home containing the neces-sary ingredients. I love to spoil my nieces with their favorite cookies and arepas. I survive winters by going to the gym and painting the walls of my home in bright colors.
Each year millions of Americans face the reality of living with a mental illness. During May, NAMI and the rest of the country are raising awareness for mental health. Each year we fight stigma, provide support, educate the public, and advocate for policies that support people with mental illness and their families. We hope you join us in our efforts this month and help us continue our mission.

**What’s Happening In May?**

**Action Online: May 4 – 8**
Action Online is an advocacy day to spread awareness about mental health, learn about current legislative issues, and tell your elected officials what people affected by mental illness need to thrive!

Important dates & times:
- May 4th @ 4PM - NAMI Smarts
- May 7th @ 10:30AM - Learn the Issues
- May 7th @ 11AM - Live Panel of Experts

Register online to get the Zoom info and don't forget to follow us on social media for more updates!

namiwisconsin.org/action-on-the-square

**Coloring Sheets**
In honor of Mental Health Awareness Month, we are planning a statewide scavenger hunt to help spread awareness about mental illness and end the stigma! All you have to do is put one of our coloring sheets in your window during the month of May. That’s it!

Color it, paint it, print it from the printer, whatever you’d like. Then we can get outside, walk around, and see how many people are fighting to end the stigma!

namiwisconsin.org/color

**Casserole Recipe Book**
When someone is diagnosed with a physical illness they are usually showered with support, messages of kindness, and casseroles from friends and family. Unfortunately, that is not always the case when someone is diagnosed with a mental illness. We would like to change this narrative and create a casserole recipe book for people who are affected by mental illness.

Please fill out this form with your favorite casserole recipe and we will send you a free cookbook!

namiwisconsin.org/mham
Governor Evers Signs Response Bill to Address COVID-19

The governor recently signed into law a response bill that includes a package of initiatives to address COVID-19 pandemic. The bill would qualify the state for $3.9 million in federal Medicaid dollars and temporarily lift the one-week waiting period for unemployment benefits. The bill comes at a time when the Governor also expanded the stay-at-home order until May 26. Though we appreciate the judgment used to dress some of the issues surrounding this pandemic, we still have a lot of work left to be done. Below are some initiatives from National that can help us here in Wisconsin.

• Eliminate barriers to telehealth.
• Support people with mental illness maintain wellness while preventing further spread to COVID-19.
• Give equal attention to mental health treatment as expected to rise as a result of this crisis, state authorities should ensure that Medicaid and state-regulated commercial health plans cover telehealth.
• Maintain access to medications. State authorities should require all state-regulated health plans to provide extended supplies and/or mail order refills of pre-scriptions. Restrictions on pre-scription refills increase risk of COVID-19 care for people trying to maintain their mental health treatment.
• Expand Medicaid mental health services. State authorities should use Medicaid waiver flexi- bility to strengthen the array of covered mental health services and add “optional” or nontraditional services that are known to strengthen resiliency and can be delivered via telehealth or at home, such as peer support, family support and respite care.
• Extend Medicaid to more people.
• Increase access to medical care and personal hygiene products.
• Prioritize housing supports for people with serious mental illness. Congress is directing additional funds to state and local housing agencies to assist people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of falling into homelessness. State and local housing agencies should ensure that these emergency funds are directed to help people living with mental illness, who are particularly vulnerable during this emergency.
• Place a statewide moratorium on evictions. The federal government has already taken action to place a 60-day moratorium on evictions, however this policy only applies to certain homes with fed- erally-backed mortgages. To keep people and communities safe during this crisis, state and local authorities should suspend evictions from all housing during the pandemic.
• Implement alternatives to incarceration.

Living with a Mental Illness & Coping with COVID-19

Scott Anderson, Milwaukee Regional Editor for Wisconsin Patch

RACINE, WI — When the coronavirus public health emergency shut down schools, businesses and restrict-ed travel in Wisconsin, it changed how I and my family functioned.

Our two children were home full-time. The coffee shops and government offices I visited each week as I wrote about communities around the Milwaukee area were closed. My wife and I were working only from home.

I felt trapped, and the anxiety symptoms I had been managing for at least five years started reasserting themselves. In the moment, I couldn’t understand why. Upon reflection it was obvious: I was now sharing my once-quiet workspace with my spouse—who also works from home—and our son, 12, and daughter, 8.

As a journalist, I was writing almost exclusively about the coronavirus in my community, and curiously typing away at those stories in an environment full of distractions. It felt like the screws were slowly tightening on my life.

What had once been a well-defined routine felt like it was spiraling out of control. I was no longer taking kids to school, driving to work, taking breaks, and returning home to throw myself into family time. I found myself absentmindedly mixing worklife, parenting and running a household. Everybody’s lives had been disrupted and the emotional wattage was overpowering. I had trouble sleeping, was regularly becoming irritable in family situations and started having panic attacks.

I have years of mental health education and therapy to draw on, and I had to do something.

I started by cutting out all caffeine, and focusing on sleeping. I accepted that an as-needed mediation was once again something that was necessary—and acceptable—for my life.

Yet it wasn’t until my spouse and I started working together that my more serious anxiety symptoms began to subside. It has by no means been easy, and I’m learning how to pace myself to avoid being overwhelmed.

Easing Anxiety’s Bite

Here are two solutions my spouse and I set up:

1) Parent Shifts: Feeling like “I’m not enough” has been a consistent trigger whether that’s at my job or at home. That’s especially true now. My spouse and I have worked diligently to come up with a schedule that balances work with parent duties.

It’s been a lot of trial-and-error. If our children aren’t supervised, or given a focused task to perform, they typically revert to playing video games or watching YouTube. Our family views screen time as a net positive: it’s the one way our children stay in touch with the outside world, and it’s where our children do schoolwork. Yet at the same time, too much screen time sours our children to each other, and to us.

On a typical day, I make breakfast and supervise chil-dren until about 10 a.m. My spouse makes lunch and supervises them between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. I watch the news between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. We have a chart where our children can pick a number of required tasks to complete: outside time, playing together, reading, math, chores and free time.

Before our plan, I had an overwhelming feeling that I wasn’t living up to my expectations at home. Even though we have a plan, we’re still not supervising our children as much as I’d like, but we’re keeping track of our contributions as parents, and valuing those contributions.

2) Red/Yellow-Green: One of my strongest triggers is writing an intense story while being interrupted by children or a well-meaning spouse. One day, we talked about how to prioritize focus time to help us cope with the new reality of working at home with the whole family.

We set up a simple red-yellow-green system. When one parent is “red,” they’re focusing intensely and can’t be interrupted. The other parent handles all child issues. We try to only have one parent in “red” at the same time. When a parent is “yellow,” they’re available, but only for emergencies. When a parent is “green” we can tend to child needs as they arise. We check-in with each other throughout the day so we know...

Cont. next page >
You’re Part Of A Community

If you’re reading this, I hope two things for you: that you realize you’re not alone in this struggle and have allies just about everywhere, and secondly, that you have found something useful from my story.

Every morning, I take a walk around the block in my neighborhood. During my walks, people have interrupted their yard work, their construction work, their dog walks and their pre-work routines just to stop and talk. I think people just want to share their experience to validate that they’re doing well in their own lives, and to understand that they’re not alone.

They’re right on both accounts. You’re welcome to reach out.

Scott Anderson is the Milwaukee Regional Editor for Wisconsin Patch, where he writes stories in the Metro Milwaukee area. Scott has been a news writer and photojournalist for more than 20 years. He lives with a mental health diagnosis, and wants to help people through his profession and direct experience. Scott previously served on the NAMI Wisconsin board. Today, he can be reached at scott.anderson@patch.com.

Ask the Doctor

Joshua Babu, MD

When to Consider Taking Medications for Anxiety and Depressive Disorders

When people come to a psychiatric evaluation with me for the first time, particularly if they are seeking medication help for the first time, there is a lengthy discussion that takes place about what medications do, their benefits versus their risks, how long to take them, etc. One of the most important questions is how does one know when to consider taking medications. I answer it with the following description.

Most of us want to be a smooth steady line in life. We’re even keeled and balanced and when life stressors occur, we adapt, and move on. However, sometimes life throws us too many curve balls or our natural vulnerabilities to develop anxiety or depression start to put us out of our mental balance and then our line becomes a bit squiggly. When to Consider Taking Medications for Anxiety and Depressive Disorders

Early in this process when we’re just having some minor impairment like having the occasional panic attack, underlying anxiety that intrudes in to our thoughts as we go about our daily tasks, or the occasional crying spell to vent out our feelings, I actually discourage patients from considering medications. Part of life is that we need adversity to strengthen us so that we can grow and develop. When there is only mild-moderate impairment I often first encourage patients to utilize therapy and focus on wellness strategies like eating healthy, exercising, doing your hobbies more, spending time with family and friends more, going to church more, avoiding toxic people, etc. Often, these powerful strategies can even out our lines again. I also personally believe that a few days or even a week or two of symptoms, doesn’t warrant medication intervention.

However, sometimes life stressors are too overwhelming, or our underling vulnerabilities progress too quickly and intensely, and we’re just not able to initiate those much-needed holistic interventions. Our squiggly line starts to spiral downward and we fall into a vicious spiral loop that I call the “mental flu”.

As you know, when you have the actual physical flu, you have congestion, fevers, headaches, muscle aches, fatigue, etc. You’re clearly not at your physical best and you often are not able to go to work or school or play 4 quarters of basketball (unless you’re Michael Jordan).

While it may not be as obvious, the “mental flu” is just as debilitating, if not more so, and you’re not at your mental best. You become exhausted from dealing with anxiety, stress, and panic attacks. You become too stressed or sad to enjoy your hobbies or relationships. You may have lack of energy or motivation, you may not eat well or sleep well, and even your thinking may be quite impaired.

As the “mental flu” develops and progresses, real neurochemical imbalances start to occur that continue to propagate the vicious cycle that may last weeks to months or even years. If it was so easy to snap out of this spiral, everyone would be doing it and there wouldn’t be a need for hospitals, psychiatrists, and therapists.

We can apply this process to many disease models like high blood pressure, cholesterol, or diabetes. All these conditions exist on a spectrum and can vary quite a bit in severity but especially when people are young, most often start at a healthy level as just blood pressure and not hypertension or as normal blood sugar levels and not diabetes. However, as time goes on and the stressors and triggers get stacked against them, these conditions develop into disorders.

Would you ever tell someone to snap out of their diabetes, or their high cholesterol, or their high blood pressures: of course not! It takes a lot of work to get those disorders under control and they often do end up requiring medication intervention when they are at their worst so that long-term damage doesn’t occur.

In the same way, people can’t just snap themselves out of anxiety and depressive disorders. This fact is important to recognize so that others can provide compassion and especially the patient themselves can apply self-compassion.

While it would be nice if we didn’t have to initiate medications and certainly we should strive to taper off them if possible, it is not a sign of weakness to request medication intervention for your mind when your quality of life is suffering and you are no longer at your best self. It is no more a sign of weakness than a person who requests to take a medication because their blood pressures are so high that they’re in jeopardy of developing a stroke.

At the same time, I don’t think medications always have to be a long-term answer. It may be one pill that holds up the foundation of wellness but we can strengthen other pillars such as how much a person exercises, eats health, sleeps sufficiently, engages in their hobbies and passions, or spends time with their social support system. Even with medication intervention, we need to work on strengthening the other pillars of wellness so that over time we can taper off the medication, or keep them at the lowest effective doses and at the fewest amount of medications possible.

Treatment can be comprehensive as well as dynamic and it’s important for everyone including providers, therapists and patients, to remember to pause and reflect on what the current treatment plan is and if it’s the best fit plan for the struggle that is going on and to adjust according to the context with consideration of the short term and long term goals of the patient.

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Help NAMI Wisconsin bring vital education programs to people affected by mental illness.

Yes, I’d like to join NAMI:  □  $5 Open Door Membership  □  $40 Regular Membership  □  $60 Household Membership
Yes, I’d like to renew my membership:  □  $5 Open Door Membership  □  $40 Regular Membership  □  $60 Household Membership
Yes, I want to support NAMI Wisconsin with the following gift:
□  $250  □  $100  □  $50  □  $25  □  Other $__________

Name ____________________________________________________________

Address __________________________________________________________
City __________________________ State ________ Zip ______
Phone: Home ________________________ Cell __________ Email __________________________
Please charge $__________ to my:  □  Visa    □  MasterCard
Acct # __________________________ Exp. Date __________/__________

Name on Card __________________________________________ Signature __________________________

Is your donation being made in memory or in honor of someone special? If so, please complete the following:
□  In memory of: __________________________________________________________
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Address to which we should send recognition of honoree: ________________________________

Donors may be publicly acknowledged.  □  Please check here if you prefer your gift to remain anonymous.

Be part of the movement that helps families find help and find hope.
88 cents of every dollar you give to NAMI Wisconsin goes directly to program expenses that support Wisconsin residents. Please consider making a gift to NAMI Wisconsin. Your support is tax-deductable and touches the lives of hundreds of families throughout Wisconsin.

Please consider making a generous gift today.