



Life Transitions Newsletter

February 2008



Dear Clients,

This issue covers: does going to church improve your mental health, the latest updates on medicaid spend down, is gardasil safe for our daughters and updates on fibromyalgia. Plus some interesting book recommendations.

Wishing you and yours a Happy Valentine's Day.

Sincerely,

Penny Blazej, LCSW, BCD

Does going to Church Improve Your Mental Health?

This debate has been going on since Freud and Jung took opposing positions on the importance of religion in life. With Jung recognizing religion's

importance in the human experience and Freud emphasizing religion as a source of immature illusions.

Since then, there have been voluminous research reports in the literature that generally support Jung's view (sorry Freud). A clinical study published in the September 2006 issue of the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry certainly added to Jung's point of view that mental health is enhanced by regularly attending religious services.

The author, Baetz, split 37,000 people into two groups: those who attended religious services regularly and those who said that spiritual values helped them find meaning and comfort in their lives but did not belong to an organized religion. The study showed that the religious group had lower rates of depression, panic, and mania and that, surprisingly, the spiritual group had higher rates.

Many conclusions could be drawn from these results. Perhaps those with mental illness seek out spiritual answers and move away from organized religion. Or maybe the socialization of church helps to decrease and/or prevent mental health issues. Or those with mental health issues do not have access to organized religion (lack of transportation for example).

One other possible explanation is that with organized religions the "church" family tends to help others, getting their parishioners out of "self" and into doing well for others. The process of helping those in more need than ourselves can provide a new perspective that can bring about healing. Those in the study who



Life Transitions Newsletter

February 2008

claim spiritual values but do not attend any type of “service” may not be involved in helping others, hence focusing more on their own problems which may lead to increases in anxiety and depression.

In addition, belonging to a church can provide the secure feeling that a support system gives. Knowing that there are people who care and would help in times of need certainly would decrease anxiety and increase hope. Sometimes just having someone to be with physically can decrease the feelings of isolation that often lead to depression. There have been numerous studies showing that elderly who have a strong support system do far better during emotional or physical crisis than those who do not.

And of course, let’s not underestimate the power of prayer. Dr. Benson of Harvard University, considered the father of mind/body medicine, has shown in his research that repetitive prayer does produce a physical relaxation response that is known to decrease stress and increase feelings of well being.

So does going to church improve your mental health? Sorry Freud but this time I have to agreed with Jung (and the numerous researchers after him) and say YES! See you in church!

For more information go to:

Herbert Benson, M.D., is the Director Emeritus of the Benson-Henry Institute (BHI), and Mind/Body Medical Institute Associate Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School.
<http://www.mbmi.org/benson/bio.as>

www.psychotherapynetworker.org

What are the Latest Updates on Medicaid Spend Down?

Kiplinger’s November 2007
Your Money page 77

There are tougher restrictions with respect to Medicaid coverage. The new rules are worth reviewing. The “look back” went **from three years to five**. What does that mean? If you give any of your assesses away during the five-year look-back period it will trigger a penalty period during which you will not be eligible for government aid. The penalty period equals the amount given away divided by the average cost of nursing-home care in your area.

What does this mean to you? The family members who received your gifts may have to pay nursing-home bills during the penalty period until you qualify for Medicaid.

NET: Planning is even more critical now than it has been in the past. Creative solutions are needed like irrevocable trusts to shelter assets. Also transferring of assesses early on so they do not fall within the five-year look-back. A good elder-law lawyer can help you set up creative solutions to protect your assesses.

For more information go to
www.medicaid.gov.



Life Transitions Newsletter

February 2008

Is Gardasil safe for our daughters?

Let's review a few facts before answering the question of whether the vaccine is safe for our daughters. First, Gardasil does not prevent cervical cancer. Rather, it may offer some protection against a **few** of the sexually transmitted viruses that can lead to cervical cancer when left undetected and untreated for years.

Secondly, it is not one shot but a series of two which are reported to be painful much longer than other shots. It has been reported that at least 180 girls have fainted after getting the vaccine.

Thirdly, there are some risks to getting the vaccine. The following adverse events have been reported in connection with the vaccine:

- 5 deaths
- 1,981 emergency visits
- 143 hospitalizations
- 68 cases of permanent disability, and
- 51 life-threatening events

Please keep in perspective that thousands of girls of received the vaccine.

Lastly, there are over 100 HPVs so in order to keep our girls safe it is important to teach them good sexually habits as soon as they become (if not before) sexually active. Remember these viruses can be spread just through touching, in other words, sexual intercourse is not needed to spread them.

So to answer the question on whether the vaccine is safe you need to consult your MD. More importantly, it is important to educate our daughters about these virus and how to avoid being exposed.

Once again is Fibromyalgia real?

With the emergence of the new Pfizer drug Lyrica being approved by the FDA for the treatment of fibromyalgia, the controversy of whether fibromyalgia is real or not is once again in the press.

Supporters feel that Lyrica legitimize fibromyalgia as Prozac did for depression others continue to take the position that fibromyalgia is not a disease and does not exist at all. The latter group feels the problems lay in the psychological realm stating the painful symptoms are caused by unhappiness or trouble primary relationships.

As diagnosed, fibromyalgia primarily affects middle-aged women and is characterized by chronic, widespread pain of unknown origin.

Several studies report that there are over 10 million people who suffer from fibromyalgia – that's about 3% of adult Americans.

Currently, the medical community does not know what causes the pain hence the debate on whether it is really a disease. This has resulted in great confusion among patients who present with this type of sever pain of unknown origin.

Despite the controversy, the American College of Rheumatology, the Food and Drug Administration and insurers



Life Transitions Newsletter

February 2008

recognize fibromyalgia as a diagnosable disease. Also, National Institute of Health is putting millions of dollars in research toward finding the cause(s) of fibromyalgia.

So, is Lyrica the answer for those who have been suffering the pain of fibromyalgia? The data is not clear. It is important to discuss whether Lyrica can be beneficial with your physician. Remember, Lyrica's side effects, which include severe weight gain, dizziness and edema, may outweigh its benefits. The answer, check with your M.D.

If you want to find out more about this disease here are the key medical players: Dr. Frederick Wolfe; Dr. Don Goldenberg; Dr. Robert Bennett; Dr. Thomas Bohr; Dr. Arthur Barsky and Dr. Daniel Rooks. You can Google any one of these names to obtain more information.

Another excellent source is the National Fibromyalgia Association:

<http://www.fmaware.org/site/PageServer>

Book Reviews

Religions of the World – The Illustrated Guide to Origins, Beliefs, Traditions & Festivals by Elizabeth Breuilly et al. This is a great basic book about the world religions that is easy to read and has excellent illustrations.

Fibromyalgia Hope from a completely New Perspective by William Glasser, M.D. I was very excited when Dr. Glasser, a well respected leader in psychology, published this book

focusing on Fibromyalgia. However, what I read disappointed me. It is essential a redo on his basic Choice Theory which has been around for decades. What was really disturbing is his belief that the pain stems from unresolved issues in the client's primary relationship. Though his advice to improve relationships is harmful his theory about the pain stemming from these relationships is! I would not recommend this read to anyone struggling with the complete issues of fibromyalgia.

Wise Words

