



Thao Nguyen Foundation Inc. Newsletter

Seventh Issue December 2015

TOGETHER, WE BRING LIGHT TO MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

IN THIS ISSUE

Greetings from the President

by Nhung Hendy, Ph.D.

Welcome to another issue of TNF newsletter. I hope this newsletter finds all of you in good mental health. A lot has happened since our last newsletter was published. We welcome a new Board Member, Philip Hall, a Navy Veteran and is currently a college student at Community College at Baltimore County (CCBC). Phil has had several years of experience in fundraising to help children in southern Japan while stationed there. He is also very active at his campus. We hope he will help us reach out to more college students and educate them about mental health awareness.

In this issue, you will find a summary of what I learned from attending a conference on brain future organized by the Mental Health Association of Maryland. Continuing our tradition of keeping our readers plugged in with the literature on mental health, I hope you'll enjoy reading a summary of recent research findings on mental health treatment.

Our Secretary and Social Media Manager, James Manley has been busy updating our Facebook page and has increased substantially our likes on Facebook. If you have not done so, please like our page: <https://www.facebook.com/TNScholarship>

Last but not least, our next Thao's Into the Light Race will be held on Sunday, May 1st 2016 at the NCR Trail (same location as last year). Please mark your calendar and join us.

Save the date! 5/1/16: Thao's Into the Light Run/ Walk

We launch a campaign to increase our funds to endow a scholarship at Loch Raven high school. After conducting some research, we know that it will take at least \$25,000 to endow a scholarship there in Thao's name. As President, I pledged \$5,000 to this endowed fund. Our Board has fully been on board with this idea and have contributed. I hope you'll join me in helping us reach our goal of raising \$25,000. We appreciate every dollar you can contribute. Your contribution is fully tax deductible. I would like to thank Yvette Lane and Sumalai Maroonroge for their monthly recurring contributions over the last two years. Please let me know if you are interested in setting up a recurring contribution through automatic checking deduction. In closing, I wish all of you a very happy and peaceful holiday season.

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Brain Future Conference Summary

By Nhung Hendy

As you know, this year is the 100th anniversary of the Mental Health Association of Maryland. To celebrate this milestone, the MHAM organized the first conference titled “Brain Future” held at the Westin hotel in Annapolis on November 4 and 5, 2015. More than 100 experts from around the world joined together at this conference to present the most cutting edge research on mental health.

A highlight of the conference was brain plasticity. Whereas stress, anxiety, obesity, and depression were found to all contribute to the shrinkage or atrophy of our brain, especially the neurons in hippocampus, exercise such as walking was found to benefit brain plasticity. Learning and diet with omega 3 fatty acids also help brain plasticity.

In the future, according to brain research experts at the conference, mental health treatment would move to the patients’ homes. Also, non-invasive treatment would be more popular and accepted than invasive ones. For example, for the first time, video games were introduced as a non-invasive way to stimulate the brain to help brain functioning and brain plasticity changes. A custom designed video game can be built to enhance cognitive functioning and control in older adults. Empirical evidence showed that such video game experience in terms of duration of intensity of the game itself was related to brain plasticity.

Brain polyphony – brain to brain communication is possible in the future using non-invasive technologies. Developed by MUSE technology, there is a brain sensing head band that you can use at home to improve mindfulness. Neurofeedback is another trend in mental health treatment that was presented and discussed at the conference. Specifically, this technology is a form of neuromodulation, which uses low current delivered directly to the

brain via small electrodes to stimulate your brain or the neurons of the hippocampus. Similar to a helmet, this device is wearable at home and was shown to result in a statistically significant reduction in anxiety, depression, and improved mindfulness according to studies presented at the conference. Although this technology was approved and is widely used in Europe, it has not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration in the U.S.

The Conference featured Patrick Kennedy, a former Congressman from Rhode Island as its keynote speaker. In his speech, he shared with the conference participants stories about his own struggle with mental illness and alcohol addiction. I felt good leaving this conference knowing that we have many cutting edge technologies that will successfully contain the spread of mental illness. However, we need to continue our efforts in increasing funding for mental research as well as promoting awareness about and removing the stigma associated with mental illness. Together we will be able to bring light to mental awareness.



A Non-invasive wireless transcranial
current stimulation (tCS)
Neurostimulator



Picture Credit: Alyssa Forsythe,
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Getting Back on the Bike

By Phil Hall

If life were a bike ride, it is often only after a crash that most people discover they have a mental health disorder. Medical treatment for any disorder comes with a requisite understanding and perception of symptoms. With something as nonphysical as mental health, however, signs of illness are not outwardly relegated to any area of the body, but, often, to the person themselves.

In order to become healthy again, it is necessary to introspectively scrutinize subjective moods and actions to provide their physician with valuable data. However, as time goes on, if this practice is not eventually reduced after a healthy period of observation, something I call ‘patient syndrome’ could eventually form.

After the shock of mental illness discovery, some people get stuck constantly searching for problems, evidence of things that separate them from “normal people.” The thing is, everyone has ups and downs in their daily lives, and with an over awareness, all of these events could be seen as attributed to the mental illness. This is a problem because if the outlook is to only find things wrong, truly living again may be delayed until “The problem is fixed.”

That however is not the point of treatment. Yes, illness may be a problem in someone’s life, but the point of mental health treatment is very proactive. It is overcoming our barriers; it is finding how to live a normal full life again in spite of the disease. It is neither possible nor enjoyable to sit stationary atop a bike and try to remain perfectly balanced for long. No, as life would have it, the only way to ride is to push daringly towards our goals and to allow our momentum to keep us upright.

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Research Summary

Summarized by Nhung Hendy

A group of researchers from the University of Parma, Italy, and University of Greenwich, London conducted a meta-analysis consisting of 46 primary studies and reported in the *Journal of Affective Disorders* for the first time the co-occurrence of bipolar disorder (BD) and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) in children, adolescents and adults. Specifically, the rate of having BD among OCD adults was lower than that in children and adolescents (13.5% vs. 24.2%). It was reported that BD-OCD comorbidity is a common condition in psychiatry with children and adolescents and BD-I patients as the most affected subgroup



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'Of Two Minds" Movie Screening:

An honest look at living with bipolar disorder, this documentary explores the extraordinary lives, struggles, and success of three unique individuals living with bipolar disorder in today's America. Through a combination of intimate and riveting interviews, we experience what it's like to be bipolar. Join us for a movie screening at Towson University, time and date to be announced in the spring. We are proud to partner with Towson University's Healthy Minds student group and NAMI Baltimore in this event.

Tips to prevent holiday stress and depression

From <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20047544>

The holiday season often brings unwelcome guests — stress and depression. And it's no wonder. The holidays present a dizzying array of demands — parties, shopping, baking, cleaning and entertaining, to name just a few. When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially if the holidays have taken an emotional toll on you in the past. Here are some suggestions:

1. Acknowledge your feelings. If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings.
2. Reach out. If you feel lonely or isolated, you may find support through community, religious or other social events. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.
3. Be realistic. The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As

families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones. For example, if adult children can't come to your house, find new ways to celebrate together, such as sharing pictures, emails or videos.

4. Set aside differences. Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. And be understanding if others get upset when something goes awry. Chances are they're feeling the effects of holiday stress and depression, too.
5. Stick to a budget. Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend and stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts. Instead consider donating to a charity in someone's name, giving homemade gifts, or starting a family gift exchange.
6. Plan ahead. Set aside specific days to shop, bake, and visit friends. Plan menus and make your shopping list to help prevent last-minute scrambling for ingredients. Make sure to get help for party prep and cleanup.
7. Learn to say no. Saying yes to too much can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity. If it's not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.
8. Don't abandon healthy habits. Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt. Try these suggestions: Have a healthy snack before holiday parties so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks. Get plenty of sleep. Incorporate regular physical activity into each day.
9. Take a breather. Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you to handle what you need to do. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing breathing and restoring inner calm.
10. Seek professional help if you need it. Sometimes you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to a doctor or mental health professional.