

CENTRAL MA MIND NETWORK

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



Project SUCCESS: Skills for the Modern World

BY KALEA BARGER

While symptoms like hallucinations and delusions in individuals with schizophrenia can often be relieved through medication treatment, their psychosocial skills unfortunately often remain impaired. Therefore, interventions targeting psychosocial skills in individuals with schizophrenia are needed. UMass MIND is one of the sites that participate in Project SUCCESS (Schizophrenia: Understanding and Comparing Cognitive Enhancement and Social Skills training) with the aim of providing evidence on the efficacy of two prominent psychosocial interventions. The project is led by Dr. Matcheri Keshavan and Russell Schutt from Harvard's Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and is funded by the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute.

Our site will be providing social skills training to participants in a group setting over a span of 12 months. A total of six to eight participants will be recruited for this round of the study, meeting virtually through Zoom with . This year-long rehabilitation program is centered around weekly group sessions in which social skills are explained, discussed, and practiced.

This manualized program also provides daily structure to its participants, which is helpful in providing additional support to individuals with schizophrenia living with behavioral disorganization. Each week, participants will be working on a module that focuses on a different social skills topic. These topics include Communicating Effectively, Healthy Living, Intimacy and Dating, Living Independently in the Community, Making and Keeping Friends, Making the Most out of Healthcare Visits, Making the Most out of Leisure Time, and Using Medications Effectively. Each participant will then apply the skills they learn during group sessions in their daily living.

Project SUCCESS is an ongoing study with rolling enrollment. If you or someone you know might be interested in this study, please contact us at 508-856-MIND (6463) or by e-mail at mind@umassmed.edu.



Community Mentoring Program

BY CATHERINE LEONARD

People living with serious mental illness experience a shorter life expectancy and have a mortality rate that is 2 to 4 times higher than those who are in good mental health. This major gap is associated with factors such as stigma and discrimination, lack of environmental and social supports, past traumatic experiences, debilitating psychiatric symptoms, substance use and poor diet.

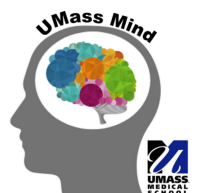
In the past, our Early Psychosis Detection and Intervention (EDI) module had worked to increase awareness and decrease stigma for those living with symptoms of psychosis through virtual presentations to collegiate students in recognizing early indicators of psychosis. In the most recent project development, our group created the Community Mentoring Program (CMP) and hope to foster a longer lasting connection between those living with serious mental illness and the clinical field.

Our unique mentoring program incorporates a multi-level team that includes licensed mental health professionals, people with lived experiences, and medical residents and students to create a supportive environment to aid individuals in their struggles.

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This program is structured around a six month educational period for mentees and each month highlights a new topic for them to learn and focus on. The topics range from coping skills to health and wellness and vocational training and aim to help mentees develop necessary skills of self advocacy amongst mentees. The end goal of this project is to help mentees achieve their professional goals while developing and maintaining a healthy support system by utilizing available resources in the community.

Mentors have a critical role in our program of being the bridge between individuals living with serious mental illness on college campuses and professional clinical support. Providing the necessary environment and educational support is crucial in assisting those living with serious mental illness, and our community mentoring program aims to do just that!



Understanding Mental Health in Asian Americans

BY NATASHA NADAR

May is Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. On May 19th, 2021, Dr. Xiaoduo Fan hosted a webinar event that aimed to shed light on mental health among Asian American populations. This event was part of an initiative by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)'s New England Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network.

Asian Americans are the fastest growing minority group in America, with at least 43 ethnic subgroups speaking more than 100 dialects and accounting for 7% of the population in the United States. For most Asian Americans, Asian cultures have significantly shaped the development of their explanatory models of mental health.

At this event, Dr. Fan provided a brief examination on the influences of the religious and philosophical customs of the Asian population on the understanding, clinical manifestation of mental illness and treatment seeking behaviors. For example, popular Asian religions such as Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism all affect an individual's presentation of mental illness and their attitudes toward it in varying ways. Additionally, the mental health toll of recent anti-Asian racism and being perceived as a "model minority" was discussed during the event.

The common myth that Asian Americans are uniformly well adjusted, and that they tend to attain more socio-economic success than other minority groups was broken down and fact-checked during the event. In reality, the Asian American minority as a whole is the most economically divided minority group, and is least likely to be promoted to management/leadership positions in the workplace.

During the second part of the event, Dr. Fan led a clinically oriented discussion to address barriers to treatment such as the high cost and the lack of available services in mental health care for Asian Americans. In addition, more Asian-specific challenges such as racism, discrimination, stigma, stereotypes, and language barriers were discussed. It is critical that mental health professionals recognize these challenges when providing treatment and care to their Asian American patients.

