



*Lifting Life's Possibilities*

O u t l o o k  
 ALABAMA \* DMHMR

May/June 2007

# FROM THE COMMISSIONER



Spring is a time of growth and renewal, and I enjoy the beauty of the budding dogwood trees and flowers near my home in Coosada. Spring is also a very active time, in many respects, in state government. The Alabama Legislature is in session. The halls of the State House are filled with lobbyists, and the steps are filled with advocates for various causes. Our staff is busy assisting me in preparation for budget hearings and other tasks related to department initiatives.

With all this activity going on it is easy to lose sight of our overall purpose ... serving people. It was truly refreshing to attend our Mental Retardation Spring Conference, the 32nd Annual Alabama School of Alcohol and Other Drug Studies Conference, and our Consumer Conference at Shocco Springs. As an added attraction, I appreciated the privilege of speaking to hundreds of mental health professionals at the Alabama Council for Community Mental Health Boards conference this year.

The state is moving forward in noticeable ways through economic development. We are entering a new phase of development as well. We are moving closer and closer to a truly consumer-driven system. As we work together in the coming months, more consumers than ever before will be part of the department's strategic planning process. The wheels of progress of the mental health system will be turning in the right direction.

*John M. Houston*

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## Bipolar Spectrum Disorder May Be Underrecognized and Improperly Treated

A new study by the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) supports earlier estimates of the prevalence of bipolar disorder in the U.S. population, and suggests the illness may be more accurately characterized as a spectrum disorder. It also finds that many people with the illness are not receiving appropriate treatment. The study, published in the May 2007 issue of *Archives of General Psychiatry*, analyzed data from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R), a nationwide survey of mental disorders among more than 9,000 Americans ages 18 and older. The NCS-R was funded by NIMH.

NIMH researcher Kathleen Merikangas, Ph.D. and colleagues identified prevalence rates of three subtypes of bipolar spectrum disorder among adults. Bipolar I is considered the classic form of the illness, in which a person experiences recurrent episodes of mania and depression. People with bipolar II experience a milder form of mania called hypomania that alternates with depressive episodes. People with bipolar disorder not otherwise specified (BD-NOS), sometimes called subthreshold bipolar disorder, have manic and depressive symptoms as well, but they do not meet strict criteria for any specific type of bipolar disorder noted in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*, the reference manual for psychiatric disorders. Nonetheless, BD-NOS still can significantly impair those who have it.

The results indicate that bipolar I and bipolar II each occur in about one percent of the population; BD-NOS occurs in about 2.4 percent of the population. The findings support international studies suggesting that, given its multi-dimensional nature, bipolar disorder may be better characterized as a spectrum disorder.

"Bipolar disorder can manifest itself in several different ways. But regardless of type, the illness takes a huge toll," said NIMH Director Thomas R. Insel, M.D.

Nearly everyone who had bipolar I or II (89 to 95 percent) received some type of treatment, while 69 percent of those with BD-NOS were getting treatment. Those with bipolar I or II were more commonly treated by psychiatric specialists, while those with BD-NOS were commonly treated by general medical professionals.

"Because bipolar spectrum disorder commonly coexists with other illnesses, it is likely underrecognized, and therefore, undertreated. We need better screening tools and procedures for identifying bipolar spectrum disorder, and work with clinicians to help them better spot these bipolar symptoms," concluded Dr. Merikangas.

Source: National Institute of Mental Health  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/press/bipolarsurvey.cfm>



NIMH produces various informational brochures, including this one on bi-polar disorder.

## New Resources Unveiled on Children's Mental Health Awareness Day



During National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day on May 8, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) unveiled new evaluation data demonstrating the effectiveness of comprehensive school- and community-based strategies. The new data shows that children and youth with mental health needs in systems of care are less likely to engage in self-harmful behaviors, demonstrate fewer emotional and behavioral problems and do better in school than before enrollment. The evaluation data can be found online at [www.systemsofcare.samhsa.gov](http://www.systemsofcare.samhsa.gov).

Also in recognition of National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, in collaboration with the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, released a guide to help workforce development practitioners, administrators, and policymakers enhance their understanding of youth with mental health needs and the supports necessary to help them transition into the workforce and adulthood successfully. It can be found at <http://ent.groundspring.org/EmailNow/pub.php?module=URLTracker&cmd=track&j=140599254&u=1347975>.

### Two New Associate Commissioners Welcomed



Associate Commissioner for Administrative Services David Bennett.



Associate Commissioner for Mental Retardation Services Patricia Martin.

The Central Office in Montgomery recently welcomed two new Associate Commissioners, and said good-bye to the Director of Consumer Empowerment. David Bennett is now serving as Associate Commissioner for the Administrative Services Division. Bennett has served as the Director of Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa. He received a B.A. in sociology from Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, as well as a M.S. in guidance and counseling from the University of West Alabama in Livingston. He previously served on the boards of American Red Cross - West Alabama, Tuscaloosa Peer Support Group and West Alabama Aids Outreach.

Patricia Martin is the new Associate Commissioner for the Division of Mental Retardation Services. Martin most recently had been the Executive Director of the Cahaba Center for Mental Health and Mental Retardation in Selma for more than 26 years. She received a B.A. in economics from the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada, and a M.S. in personnel management from Troy State University, at the

Maxwell Air Force Base campus. She has previously served on the boards of the Selma/Dallas County Chamber of Commerce, Wallace Community College-Selma Foundation, the YMCA and the Alabama Special Education Advisory Board. She is actively involved with the United Way. Eranell McIntosh-Wilson has moved from Associate Commissioner for the Division of Mental Retardation Services, and now serves as a Special Advisor to the Commissioner.

Joe Meadours, Director of the Consumer Empowerment Office in the Division of Mental Retardation, recently said good-bye to the department and state as he accepted a new position as the Executive Director People First of California.

### 2007 Alabama Recovery Conference a Success

Congratulations to Mike Autrey and staff in the Office of Consumer Relations for another successful consumer conference at Shocco Springs held May 1-3, 2007. The conference, with the theme of "Small Changes Can Make Big Differences," was attended by more than 900 consumers who were encouraged by the seminars and fellowship.



This group travelled from North Alabama together to attend the Consumer Recovery Conference.



Grants and Community Outreach Coordinator Shannon Weston conducted a survey at the conference on the services available to consumers.

### Department's Participation in Health Expo Reaches Many



Staff from the Office of Public Information worked at the recent Health & Wellness Festival.

The Office of Public Information, in collaboration with NAMI Alabama, conducted a phase of its anti-stigma campaign by manning a booth at the NBC-13 Health & Wellness Festival held at the Birmingham Jefferson Convention Center May 5-6.

The festival routinely draws more than 100 exhibitors in all areas of health and wellness, as well as thousands of people. Informational brochures about different types of mental illnesses, developmental disabilities and substance abuse addiction were handed out, as well as information about the department and its services.

## Office of Deaf Services Hosts Mental Health Interpreter Institute

The 5th Annual Mental Health Interpreter Institute will be held June 4-8, 2007, at the Central Office in downtown Montgomery. This is a 40-hour course designed to provide a sound basis for interpreters to work effectively in mental health settings as part of a professional team. Course studies include: medical and mental health systems and culture, sources of communication breakdown associated with mental illness and treatment, Interpreters' roles, tools and resources and much more. It includes lectures, demonstrations, exercises, evaluation and discussion, skills and resources to ensure that services are linguistically and culturally appropriate.

The training meets the pre-practicum training requirement of interpreters working towards certification as a Qualified Mental Health Interpreter according to Alabama state code. The cost for in-state participants is \$50 and \$100 for out-of-state participants. DMH/MR employees or Interpreter Institute Alumni should contact the Office of Deaf Services at (334) 353-4703 for special rates.



*Participants attend a course lecture during last year's Mental Health Interpreter Institute.*

CAPITOL

Showcase

CONSUMER ART EXHIBITION



*Delmos is proud to pose next to the artwork he entered into the Consumer Art Exhibition.*



*Commissioner John Houston talks with Mr. Frank Calloway about his entry in last year's Consumer Art Exhibition.*

The 2007 Capitol Showcase Consumer Art Exhibition, hosted by the Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation is coming soon. Alabama artists with mental illness, mental retardation or substance addiction illnesses are encouraged to submit art that will be showcased at the Alabama State Capitol throughout the entire month of August. Later to be announced will be a reception at the capitol for artists and friends/family to recognize their work.

Requirements for the entries include that art must be no larger than 36" in any direction. No sculptures or three-dimensional work will be accepted, however, two-dimensional media including but not limited to paintings, drawings, sketchings, photography, computer art, mixed-media, etchings or cut-outs will be accepted. Works chosen must be finished, dry and suitable for hanging. We would prefer they be matted/canvas, however framed art will be accepted.

There is no entry fee to participate, but all artwork must be original and that of the artist. Participants are required to submit a photo of the piece of artwork that they wish to enter, and complete and return an Entry Form, Notification Card and story about themselves. More than 40 entries will be accepted and judged. All entries must be received by June 22, 2007. For more information, or to obtain an entry form, please contact the Office of Consumer Relations at 334-242-3456.

### State Farm Donates to The Pathfinder of Huntsville

The Pathfinder of Huntsville recently received a donation of \$5,000 from State Farm Area Agents to help with their programs. Darin Geiger, Executive Director for The Pathfinder said, "This donation is vital in order to enhance our efforts of providing a structured environment for recovery from chemical dependence and a path to community responsibility. Recovery and addiction are unfortunately viewed often times as a moral issue, yet the fact is that it is a disease, and we appreciate State Farm supporting us in this manner."

Since 1976, The Pathfinder, Inc. has provided long-term residential rehabilitation services to more than 1,200 men and women diagnosed with alcohol and/or drug dependence. Pathfinder services include alcohol/drug-free transitional housing, individual and group recovery counseling, independent living skills education and training, transportation, referrals to community resources and employment, nutrition, utilities, laundry facilities and supplies, as well as other needs for everyday living. It is the only non-profit residential rehabilitation program in Madison County certified by the department.

### Mobile Mental Health Receives Federal Grant

Mobile Mental Health has begun implementing a telemedicine and distance-learning network that will support five rural facilities in Mobile and Washington counties through a \$72,000 Rural Utilities Service (RUS) grant disbursed through the US Department of Agriculture. Inadequate local professional resources, extended travel, limited facilities, and exorbitant costs are the most common barriers that rural providers face when attempting to supply psychiatric service.

"Recognition of these difficulties has been the driving force behind our determination to develop this project," said Tuerk Schlesinger, Mobile Mental Health CEO. The grant funds the development of technology systems necessary to implement this program. "Telemedicine has been a part of our long-range plan for several years now," Schlesinger said.

Through telemedicine and distance learning technology, Mobile Mental Health employees can achieve what is required of them without leaving their offices. They also will gain access to group discussions, specialty training and a myriad of other educational opportunities that were previously cost prohibitive. Consumers living in rural areas can also receive the care they need without leaving their communities. The technology systems and hardware should be in place by June. Mobile Mental Health was one of 103 grant recipients in 38 states to receive a portion of the \$26 million disbursed by the United States Department of Agriculture.

### Bi-partisan Alabama Autism Taskforce Created

Lt. Governor Jim Folsom, Jr. and State Representative Cam Ward recently announced the creation of the Alabama Autism Task Force. Joining Folsom and Ward were representatives from the department, the Autism Society of Alabama, along with families and service providers throughout the state.

Rep. Ward has a child with autism and he says he hopes at least as a minimum the task force will address issues such as sources of funding for more research into autism within the state, more helpful tools to diagnose autism at an early age and to make sure it is properly diagnosed, and how "we as a state deal with the transition from childhood to adulthood" for those who have autism. The task force will also explore the diverse issues faced by families who are impacted by autism throughout the state.

The Alabama Autism Task Force will be comprised of individuals from throughout state government and the private sector. DMH/MR Commissioner John Houston said, "The Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation is excited to participate on this task force to address the impact that autism spectrum disorders have upon Alabama children and their families. This broad-based task force has the opportunity to envision and develop a statewide plan for meeting the unique needs of this population."

Nationally, The Centers for Disease Control and prevention have called autism a national public health crisis, and that one in every 150 children in the United States is diagnosed with autism each year.

The task force will report its findings, conclusions and recommendations to the Legislature no later than the third legislative day of the 2008 Regular Session.

### George Neal Encourages Others to Get Involved

George Neal has been living and teaching the "Focus on What I Can Do" motto for many years now. Currently, George is the president of People First of Alabama, an organization that is managed by people with cognitive disabilities with the mission of supporting and enhancing the self-advocacy movement. He knows first hand that sometimes people have misconceptions about the abilities of people with developmental disabilities. He says, "Some people don't take the time to get to know me, they just see the surface, but there are others who look deeper and see that I can do whatever I set my mind to." That can-do attitude has impacted almost every part of George's life as it led to his desire to get a driver's license, something he calls his proudest accomplishment. He said, "I had a younger brother that was three years younger than me and he got his license before me. I decided then that I was going to learn to drive and my grandmother taught me how. Next year I will have had my driver's license for 20 years."

That same attitude has also resulted in George's full-time job with Trinity Hospital in the environmental services department, and his position with People First of Alabama. Many years ago when George was in an occupational rehab program (where he received job training and learned skills such as cooking, shopping and cleaning) he got his first job through supported employment with the help of a job coach. It was in talking with his job coach that he heard about People First and they decided to start a Shelby County chapter. Through his involvement with the chapter, he attended a state conference where they were having board member elections. He decided the best way to learn more about the organization was to join the board so he ran and got elected. His need to become more involved and learn more about the organization then led him to successfully run for president. He thinks it's important to be a self-advocate saying, "You have to learn to speak up for yourself or life will pass you by, and getting involved in an organization like People First of Alabama which advocates for better housing and jobs for people with mental retardation has shown me that we can change things. It makes an impact for me but also for others, and I feel better when I have spoken up and made a difference."



*George Neal speaks at the People Can't Wait Rally held in downtown Montgomery.*

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