



TREATMENT
ADVOCACY
CENTER

STATEMENT

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How severe are the most severe mental illnesses?

The authors of *A Federal Failure in Psychiatric Research: Continuing NIMH Negligence in Funding Sufficient Research on Serious Mental Illnesses* challenge the National Institute of Mental Health to make its foremost priority research of the most severe psychiatric illnesses. Key to assessing that challenge is an appreciation of the degree of severity of the most serious illnesses, like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

The Treatment Advocacy Center receives thousands of e-mails each year from the loved ones of those who suffer from the most acute and chronic mental illnesses. The excerpts from four emails that follow offer a window into the devastation that can result from these biological illnesses.

From a Mother:

I am the mother of a 34-year-old son who was diagnosed as having paranoid schizophrenia in his late teens. He has been on and off "medications," in and out of hospitals, and in trouble with police (when off meds.) several times. In January 2002, he had been without meds., for several months, severely "decompensated," and was hospitalized in Ohio...He was in-hospital, for 2 weeks...and he was released. One week and a day after release, he returned to our home, attacked me, and has been indicted for "attempted murder"...If you are interested in the full story, and can offer assistance, please contact.

From a Daughter:

...I am desperately seeking help for my mother. My mother is severely affected by schizophrenia. I was taken away from my mother at the age of 7 because she was unable to care for me. I am 24 now currently dedicating my life to helping her...My mother had been missing from our family for the past five years. Through a lot of investigation I recently found her living homeless in a shelter It took a couple of days of patience to get her to accept the fact that I am her daughter. She suffers from hallucinations, delusions of grandeur, she feels a satellite is always watching her, and I believe that she can definitely be harmful to herself and others. I live [across the country] and I don't have enough money to immediately get her here. Therefore I call the shelter every day at 6:00 to make sure she is there for the night until I can get her here....I feel helpless, my family has given up on her, but I haven't. I understand she is not in denial, she is sick. Please help me!!!!!!

From a Father:

Our son...who is 34 years old is suffering from a mental disorder. He shows all the symptoms of schizophrenia. He has a Masters in Physics and up until Feb. of this year, was studying for a Doctorate in Mathematics....Until he left, he had maintained between a 3.5 and 3.9 grade point average...

In Nov. of last year he became convinced that some intelligence service (CIA, FBI, Military) had selected him as a subject to be experimented on. They were using some type of directed energy on him, which caused severe headaches, hearing high pitched noise or whispering when aimed at his head, or muscle control loss when aimed at body parts...He feels that wearing tinfoil wrapped around his head tends to reduce the effect of whatever "THEY" are using on him. These symptoms continue regardless of where he is at. He feels that they are following him or tracking him wherever he goes.

He has been living on the streets...We have been unable to get him to come live with us... I am sending this to you hoping to get some insight or advice on how to handle this.

From a Daughter:

Recently, my mother became homeless. She is 51 years old and lost her home of 25 years due to her suffering from schizophrenia...

About 2 years ago my mom started faxing several family members and friends letters with "conspiracy theory" like accusations. Slowly but surely she had disowned most of her family and all of her friends. She really believed and still does that they (we) are plotting to harm her....

The hardest thing I've ever had to do was drop my mom off at a homeless shelter...

It's been about two months and she is now refusing to stay in any homeless shelters....

The reason I wrote this is because the families dealing with this disease need help. I want to know what I can do to help change the system and make it possible for families like ours to prevent this from happening to them.

There is no reason for my mom to be on the streets and remain suffering from this disease. There has to be a way to make it work.

To these, I will add my own story. Eleven years ago, I stood on a milk crate in the middle of a Manhattan Deli, naked. Secret government agents had chased me through the streets of New York for three straight days and nights. They sought to capture and study me because of my powers, which included reading minds, telepathic control of animals, planting thoughts in others' minds, and a sort of mind-produced electronic weapon. My special abilities had kept me free, but now I was cornered. Only that plastic milk crate insulated me from the deadly radiation aimed at the deli from the satellite dish across the street. I could not leave that crate. My running was over.

I was consumed by psychosis produced by my bipolar disorder and its psychotic features. I had no idea my sickness had rendered me incapable of understanding that I was sick. To me, it was the world that had gone crazy.

I was lucky. The police took me to a psychiatric facility instead of jail. I was even more fortunate that the available psychiatric medications worked well for me, worked spectacularly well. Since that day in that deli, I have graduated from college and law school, been a practicing attorney and now help those who are as I once was.

But many do not respond as well to current medications and do not have the chance to regain their lives that I did. The challenge to NIMH – to our society – is to give each person with a severe mental illness the opportunity that I had.

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The Treatment Advocacy Center (www.psychlaws.org) is a national nonprofit dedicated to eliminating barriers to timely and humane treatment for millions of Americans with severe mental illnesses. TAC is working on the national, state, and local levels to educate civic, legal, criminal justice, and legislative communities on the benefits of assisted treatment in an effort to decrease homelessness, jailings, suicide, violence and other devastating consequences caused by lack of treatment.