

September 6, 2013

Mental Health and Wellness  
Commission Hearing

I am grateful that I am able to speak here today, on behalf of my daughter, Lisa Edgar, who suffers with Bipolar disorder, and on behalf of my entire family who have suffered the consequences of the effects of this illness.

First, some background on Lisa. Lisa was a beautiful little girl, cheerful, comical and always aspiring to excel in everything she did. She graduated high school with honors and then awarded a full 4-year academic scholarship to Wayne State University, where again she graduated with highest honors. Shortly afterwards, she married her high school sweetheart and over the next 13 years was a good wife and mother raising their 3 daughters, in a typical American home.

Then about 2002, tragedy struck! She began exhibiting unusual symptoms of anger, agitation, frustration and spending money at an alarming rate. As Lisa's condition digressed and the disorder became more unpredictable, frightening and unmanageable she was eventually hospitalized and diagnosed with bipolar disorder. At that time we had no idea what was wrong with Lisa and had never even heard the term "mania" which had Lisa's mind in it's grips.

I could literally right a book over what occurred during the next 6 years, and it would be called a tragedy. Stories that you would find hard to believe or understand unless you were part of the family that lived with this illness. I will spare you the bitter facts and description of Lisa's behavior, but let me assure you we lived a nightmare from which we could not awake. During this time, she had been admitted to 4 different hospitals, treated by at least 6 different doctors that kept her in the same vicious cycle that did nothing to help, but tended only to worsen her condition.

A never-ending cycle of erratic behavior, short hospitalizations, after a couple days the patient is pronounced "stable", and released. The, so called "stabilization" was always short lived, because she was never brought to the point where she was well enough to take control of herself and realize that she needed to stay on her medication.

For the next several years, this same scenario played out over and over again, hospitalization, "stabilization" and a quick release. All to no avail, as the illness ruled and there was no hope of improvement, because there was neither consistency in the treatment nor consistency in administering medication daily, which is VITAL for actual stabilization to improve the patient's mental condition.

Meanwhile, I researched doctors, hospitals, the Internet, bought all the reading material I could find to try to understand her condition & find her the best help available; I failed and felt hopeless.

To add to the problem, Hippa laws, that bar information, to even a mother about her own child are ludicrous in themselves and add so much stress to a family already struggling to cope with an unrelenting illness. The hippa laws need to be reviewed and revised, as they only serve more often then not as a hindrance and an unreasonable roadblock to those trying to help a mentally ill person.

After several years, we were exhausted. Little good help is available. Sometimes I wondered if doctors even have the slightest idea how to treat this horrendous disorder. There were times we had to petition the court to have Lisa involuntarily committed. A public spectacle in their neighborhood would take place, as her own children watched as police wrestled their mother to the ground to take her to the hospital. The criteria for this type of commitment are also ludicrous. They state that the patient must be a danger to himself or others. Really? Just having the disease is a DANGER to the patient, as their actions become erratic, uncontrollable and unpredictable and they become incapable of making logical decisions, especially about their own health and welfare.

At one point a doctor controlled Lisa's mania by bringing her so far down on drugs that she could barely think or function. I watched, as she had to struggle to even carry on a conversation, as it took her a long time to process even the words being spoken to her. Then came the long slow process before Lisa was functioning again to a somewhat normal degree, and able to live at home & take care of her children.

In 2009, Lisa relapsed. She digressed quickly & her condition was worse then ever, causing her to be evicted her from her home and I, her mother, reluctantly pressed charges against her for assault. Can you imagine the pain I endured as I watched the police handcuff my daughter & put her in a police car & literally take her to jail. We sadly prepared ourselves for another long battle with mental illness.

Little did we know at the time, that pressing charges against her would eventually bring her to the CMH court system, and the blessing this would turn out to be.

I absolutely attribute Lisa's remarkable recover to the process used by CMH court, and Judge Tomlinson. Had he not confined Lisa to jail, forced her to take her medications (and I do mean forced) remanded her to stay at the Lincoln House for several months, until she proved to be stable enough to stay on her meds, live on her own and find a job. Had these extreme demands not been placed on Lisa; I have no doubt she could still be in a manic state.

Lisa's mental illness ravaged her life. She lost her husband, her home, for a time her children, not to mention her dignity. None of us will ever know the struggles she encounters within herself and the difficulties she faces each day. I do not know how this story will end, however with the help of CMH court we have been able to rekindle our hope, that Lisa can remain healthy and continue down a path to living as normal a life as possible under the circumstances. I will use the words of Andy Goodman, "when people have moments when they give up and feel hopeless, that hope is held for them by others--

--whether they are aware of it or not. The candle of the hopeless will be relit again and again by the rest of us, who carry the flame of hope for them”

Those who work at CMH, relit our flame of hope and we are so grateful that they had the answers to managing Lisa's illness and setting her on the road to recovery.

In the 10 years we struggled with this disease not one doctor, hospital, or mental health facility had any successful solutions to treat Lisa's illness properly and never had any hope for recovery. We felt defeated.

It is now two and a half years since Lisa was released from the CMH court system and she is living in her own home with her youngest daughter, working a full time job for Macomb community mental health, and living a reasonably productive life, because she stays on the medication.

Our family is so grateful that CMH Court and Judge Tomlinson provided the strict, disciplined demands on Lisa that were necessary to control her illness. Though we live with cautious optimism, we thank everyone in CMH that carried that flame for us and relit our hope again.

The methods used at CMH should definitely be studied and implemented for other patients, as we can attest to those being the only successful treatment that helped our daughter to learn to live with mental illness.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Antoinette M. Tucker". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large, looping initial 'A'.

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