

Healthy Minds Across America Forums

(September 24 2008). Thousands of people turned out across the United States and in Canada on Sunday, September 14, for an unprecedented series of free public forums on how neuropsychiatric research has helped turn the tide on the devastating effects of mental health disorders, while it has also played a crucial role in fostering a better understanding of the biological mechanisms behind these illnesses.

Sponsored by NARSAD, the world's leading philanthropic organization for research on mental illnesses, the historic day of events served to launch an international public awareness campaign called "Healthy Minds Across America." Forty-seven unique forums took place at prominent universities and medical centers across the continent, where scientists who are conducting leading-edge research provided some of the latest findings on such conditions as schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders, including as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and childhood mental disorders.

The day of events saw nearly 4,000 attendees, including Colorado First Lady Jeannie Ritter, who opened the Healthy Minds Across America forum at the University of Colorado Denver. Among other notable guests at the forums were David Hamburg, M.D., former longtime president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York and an early pioneer of biological psychiatry; Oliver Sacks, M.D., famed neurologist and author; Andrew Solomon, award-winning author of "The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression"; and Barbara Leadholm, commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health.

However, most in attendance were patients seeking to learn about potential new treatments for their disorders, parents concerned about their children's chances of recovery, mental health professionals interested in understanding the causes and mechanisms of mental illnesses and how to better help their clients, special education teachers who wanted to find out how to work more effectively with their students with brain and behavior disorders, and students of psychiatry and neuroscience.

"Our Healthy Minds Across America forum drew an enthusiastic crowd nearing 100, despite dire weather reports, and we had some fabulous talks," said Carol Tamminga, M.D., Communities Foundation of Texas, Inc., Chair in Brain Science and professor of psychiatry at UT Southwestern, who serves as a member of NARSAD's Scientific Council." Our topics were ADHD and autism, with balanced preclinical and clinical presentations. The audience asked many interesting questions. I can only imagine that the forums that took place elsewhere were as good an experience as ours was here in Dallas."

Those who turned out for the Healthy Minds Across America forums heard from some of the greatest minds and talents in psychiatric and neuroscience research. The presentations covered a broad range of disorder areas and investigative inquiries, including basic research and clinical studies. After each presentation, audience members had an opportunity to ask the experts questions.

Among the many topics covered in the more than 150 presentations were, to name a handful, the genetics of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder; new therapeutic options for treatment-resistant depression, including deep-brain stimulation; the impact of hormones on depression in women; biology of addiction; and personalized treatments for autism and PTSD. For a complete list of presenters and topics, [click here](#).

One psychologist attending a Healthy Minds Across America forum at UCLA wrote, "The presentations were wonderful. I look forward to more such events, not just for my own professional understanding, but because our society will benefit from such information and, hopefully the stigma around mental illness will lessen."

"This Healthy Minds Across America event represented an unprecedented opportunity to reach out into our local communities and foster a new kind of dialogue between those affected by mental illness and the researchers who are working towards a cure," said Constance E. Lieber, president emerita of NARSAD and chairperson of the day of the events.

"With one in 10 individuals in North America suffering from a serious, chronic condition, it is our belief that events such as these help to raise awareness about the serious challenges faced by all those whose lives are touched in some way by mental illness," added Ms. Lieber.

Across the board, the experts who spoke at the Healthy Minds Across America forums represent the forefront of neuroscience and psychiatric research and included Nobel laureate Eric Kandel, M.D., of Columbia University; the heads of psychiatry departments from many of the most respected medical schools and treatment facilities across North America, as well as some early-career scientists whose research has already led to breakthroughs. Most of the speakers have received grants from NARSAD in support of their research or are members of NARSAD's Scientific Council, a group of 110 experts in the key areas of neuropsychiatric research that guides the organization's grantmaking activities.

"The inaugural launch of Healthy Minds Across America represents a new phase in NARSAD's leadership in mental health research," said Stephen A. Lieber, chairman and treasurer of NARSAD's board of directors. "We recognize the need to expand our public awareness efforts beyond isolated events, and are making a concerted effort to reach out into a greater number of communities across the continent and eventually the world. It is our desire to connect with all of those dedicated to overcoming mental illness, and the improvement of quality of life for those who suffer from its effects."

Outside the U.S. federal government, NARSAD, a nonprofit organization, is the largest source of competitive funding for mental health research. Since 1987, when NARSAD began giving grants as the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression, it has awarded more than \$238 million in research funds to over 2,700 scientists at universities and medical centers in the U.S., Canada and 26 other countries.

In 2008 alone, NARSAD gave \$19 million in grants to nearly 300 scientists conducting

clinical and basic research relating to depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, childhood mental disorders, and other conditions.

For more information on NARSAD, the research it supports and some of the latest developments in mental health research, visit www.narsad.org, or call (800) 829-8289.