

Club News

This year's Summer Garden Party was a great success with between seventy and eighty people attending. They enjoyed the sunny weather and the barbequed food. My only regret is that the music was considered too loud by some people and so next year I will have a word with the band to play more quietly.

The Concert at St Augustine's Church, Birdbrook, given by the Diversity singers will take place on Saturday 29th September this year.

Do you have a Black Dog?

Some time ago the Club's Newsletter contained a long list of famous people of the past who had experienced bipolar disorder in their life time. Among the characteristics they had in common was that they were all creative.

Advertising is a form of creativeness. Here is the story of someone who ran a highly successful advertising agency in Sydney, New York and San Francisco whilst plagued by the condition. Matthew Johnstone will never make the history books, but he published one.

All the ingredients were there. His mother suffered from bipolar disorder and so did his brother. In his early twenties he started have bouts of early morning waking, losing his appetite and weight, and generally feeling lethargic. Afraid that it might appear as a sign of weakness he tried to hide his condition by working even harder (it brought in more money, but not happiness); by changing jobs, (it made no difference to his negative feelings); by consuming ever more alcohol (and feeling worse when sobering up); by changing relationships (the lack of sexual drive did not change with it); and, finally, by travelling (i.e. running away).

The latter took him to San Francisco, having previously driven 15,000 miles down the west coast of North America. The bouts got steadily worse, he could cope no longer and even thought of terminating his life. At long last he sought help. He was diagnosed as suffering from dysthymia, prescribed antidepressants and underwent therapy. Subsequently he married a former colleague who proved a great help on the road to recovery. So did his young children, who, by their constant demands on him, ensured that there was no return to his former self-indulgence. He is now back at his old job but knows how to deal with the stresses that job entails.

What has all that to do with black dogs? From time immemorial a black dog has been regarded as an unlucky omen and the devil symbolised by it. More recently it has been used as a symbol for depressive feelings. For instance, whenever Winston Churchill felt down, he used the term. Matthew Johnstone called his book *I Had a Black Dog*. It has been published by Constable & Robinson and is available from BooksFirst at £6.64 including postage & packing (0870 160 8080: timesonline.co.uk/booksfirstbuy).

With some people it requires a shock of some sort, at which point they decide they cannot take any more. In Johnstone's case the wake-up call came on 11th September 2001. He was at the time living a few blocks away from the Twin towers and the terrible scenes he witnessed on that day left an indelible mark on him.

It was soon afterwards that the idea of a book came to him. There is no end of books in which people have externalized their depression by expressing it in writing. Johnstone's book is different in that he relies on cartoon-like drawings to tell his story. There are thirty-eight of them. One of his drawings depicts a black dog lying in bed between him and his girlfriend, stifling any intimacy between them. In another, the dog gets in the way at a social gathering, making him feel small. They are all the more effective on account of their simplicity and are accompanied by perceptive comments. The book ends on an optimistic note, for later pictures show that the beast can be brought to heel.

If you have a computer click on www.timesonline.co.uk/blackdog, where you can enjoy a slideshow of the drawings.

Peter Carpenter

If I have bipolar disorder, can I see a psychologist or a clinical social worker rather than a psychiatrist?

No. Bipolar patients need to work with a psychiatrist who is knowledgeable about the complexities of the illness. Many psychologist and social workers certainly know a great deal about bipolar disorder, but they may not be up to date on, for example, the latest drug treatments, the cutting edge clinical research and seasonal patterns of the illness. In addition, they are not legally able to prescribe bipolar medication. This does not mean you cannot seek adjunctive forms of support from psychologists, social workers and the groups that many of them run. It is beneficial to develop a long-term relationship with a psychiatrist who will come to know your moods and patterns over an extended period of time. You and your doctor must track the course of your illness together so you can jointly make modifications in your treatment when necessary.

*Why am I up, why am I down?
Roger Granet, M.D. & Elizabeth Ferber.*

Exercise

One key strategy used by people who have gotten well and stayed well is regular exercise, which is the cheapest and most available antidepressant. It is also very effective.

According to Dr Edmund Bourne, author of *The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook*, exercise does the following;

- Increases feelings of well-being
- Reduces dependence on alcohol and drugs
- Reduces insomnia
- Improves concentration and memory
- Alleviates symptoms of depression
- Gives greater control over feelings of anxiety
- Increases self-esteem

A woman who has had episodes of depression for 15 years and who now has her depression under control, says:

I feel physically and emotionally better when I keep up with my exercise routine.

Another who has been well for 10 years says:

I walk about two miles twice a week and bicycle for a mile once a week. It gets my mind off my problems and burns unused energy.

Exercising daily for at least 20 minutes each day is essential to maintaining wellness. Dr Wayne London, author of *Principles of Health*, recommends that you get three to five 30-45 minute sessions of aerobic exercise each week. More exercise than that won't be helpful, 'because it can make you sluggish, irritable and depressed', he says.

If you have not exercised regularly, however, consult your physician before you begin any exercise programme. Then start with just a few minutes and gradually work you way up. If you start too fast the resulting aches and pains may discourage you from continuing. A warm bath after you exercise can help reduce those aches and pains.

Living Without Depression and Manic Depression
Mary Ellen Copeland, M.S.

If I'm taking medication, why do I need to do some form of psychotherapy as well?

It is true that bipolar patients cannot be effectively treated without medication. However, the medications do not work unless people actually take them. The problem is that many people do not, especially when hypomanic or manic. Bipolar Disorder can wreak havoc on a person's family, social and work life. Unfortunately, the disease primarily manifests in behavioural and psychological ways that impede a person's normal day-to-day functioning. Medication alone cannot address all these issues; study after study has found medication treatment most effective in conjunction with some form of psychotherapy.

Additionally, psychotherapy appears to relieve stress-induced episodes. Even though some clinicians believe medication is really all a bipolar sufferer needs, most patients find therapy extremely helpful and supportive. According to a report on Bipolar Disorder in the Nidus Information Services newsletter, *Well Connected*, 'Therapy focused on improving self esteem, rebuilding social supports and making sure the patient complies with medical therapies is essential.'

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We love to hear from patients, carers or other supporters of our charity on any topic relating to either the newsletter or matters concerning the work we do. We are always happy to publish articles sent into us when requested to do so by the author.

Compiled by J A J Rook
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Edited by Dr A D Broadhurst