

Club News

The Summer Garden Party will be held on Saturday 14th June, 2008. Because of the expense of the barbeque there will now be a nominal charge of £5 per patient and £10 for others.

The autumn concert will take place on Saturday, 18th October, 2008

A Collection of Causes

The causes of manic depression are a tangle of heredity, biology and environment. Complicating the search is the belief that manic depression has more than one cause and that there are varieties of manic depression, each with a separate set of causes – in medical jargon, the disorder is 'heterogeneous'.

Researchers have been focusing on defective genes, brain-wave activity and brain chemistry as the main culprits. Scientists have not yet positively identified specific biological actions or sites, but they have strong suspicions. While their findings don't offer complete answers, they do suggest certain insights that make sense. The information here is not conclusive, but it does represent the current thinking of active researchers.

For certain, we know that manic depression runs in families and through generations, and so probably have genetic origins. While suffering families have been telling doctors this for years, this fact has just recently been substantiated scientifically in a number of studies.

Another certainty is that relatives of manic depressives have a much greater chance of also having an affective illness. For a relative of an affectively ill patient, the risk of being manic or depressive ranges, studies conclude, from 15% to 35%. The risk of manic depression alone, not counting unipolar depression, is 5 to 10%. (Remember the risk or incidence in the general population is round 1%.) Other researchers think the risk is even higher for female relatives. Scientist continue to explore exactly which genetic material contains the codes or mechanisms that may cause or affect the course of affective disorders.

Brain chemistry is another realm for researchers. It's an exciting area because discoveries can lead directly to effective drug treatments. Among the brain chemicals (called neurotransmitters), the primary suspects are norepinephrine (also called noradrenaline), dopamine, serotonin and acetylcholine.

Hormones, which circulate through the blood to various glands and organs are also suspects. Yet individual hormones don't circulate alone but in a system of closed loops with levels being adjusted and regulated by other hormones and ultimately, brain chemicals. So, theories about one hormone must include other hormones. Also, some hormones share cells with certain neurotransmitters and both send signals over the same fibres; their actions may be closely intertwined. It is an intricate, complicated process and science is just beginning to understand it.

A person's emotional life is another field in the search for causes of manic depression. A person's chemistry and biology interact with his life course; nature and nurture are tangled up, distinguishable but probably inseparable.

Declares the eminent researcher and psychiatrist Nancy Andersen, in *The Broken Brain*:

'Some people appear to have more natural resilience to recovering from personal disappointment than others do. An inherited lack of emotional resilience may be the predisposing factor – the necessary but not sufficient cause – in the development of affective disorders. This resilience could be programmed in the brain in its neurotransmitter systems, such as the norepinephrine and serotonin systems.'

Despite all the medical, chemical and statistical research, the causes of manic depression remain a mystery. Until someone comes up with a neat blood test, patients, families and their healers are at the mercy of interpreting what they see.

However, treating manic depression is not a mystery. Doctors have discovered a pharmacopoeia of medication and an array of talking therapies to quell the main symptoms as well as the psychological reverberations of the illness.

*We Heard the Angels of Madness
Diane and Lisa Berger.*

How do I qualify for Incapacity Benefit?

In order to qualify for Incapacity Benefit, you must prove that you are incapable of work. If you have worked at least 16 hours a week for more than eight out of the last 21 weeks, then for the first 28 weeks of a period when you are unable to work, you can claim Incapacity Benefit by submitting sick notes from your GP stating that you are not fit to do your normal job.

The scale on ICB goes up after 28 weeks and then up again after 52 weeks of sickness, when an addition based on the age you were when you first claimed ICB is paid. There are also additions for dependents.

Best of Times, Worst of Times: Simone

The 44 year old singer is the only child of the late American singer and civil rights activist Nina Simone. She recalls her mother's violent mood swings – later diagnosed as bipolar disorder – and the profound effects they had on their relationship.

I first found out that Mommy had been diagnosed with bipolar in the late 1980s. She never sat me down and told me about it – the people around her did that. She was taking medication, but it was still tough. And by the late 1990s she was also fighting cancer. In many ways, bipolar was the disorder she battled with most of her life, and I guess in wanting to understand my mother, it is this that I'm still trying to come to terms with.

It was well known that as an artist and performer, my mother wasn't the easiest person to deal with. Maybe that was not surprising, given the pressures of being in the spotlight. But a huge part of my relationship with her centred around her temper, volatility and mood swings. Those came home with her, no matter what was going on in her life.

When I was nine, growing up in New York, my parents got divorced, and that no doubt contributed to the turbulence in those early years. By then we'd already been through 13 nannies, and a pattern was emerging. One minute she'd be fine, the next

minute she'd erupt. You'd just know she'd flipped a switch because you'd feel the air shift – with a look, a gesture. Then she'd get angry, violent or she'd just leave the room. It varied. Sure, sometimes she'd be tired or hungry or she'd had a drink, but many a time there would be nothing to trigger her mood swings.

As an only child with no dad around, I was often the only witness, the one her anger would be directed at. I was desperate to counter her negativity but even then she's say things like: *'Why are you so f***ing positive?'*

When I reached my teens, Mommy left the US to live in Africa and Europe and I went with her. Then, when I was 13, she sent me to a Swiss boarding school, and that's where I began to feel free from all the things that brought me down. A year later she wanted me to live with her again, but I refused. I just didn't want to deal with her on a daily basis.

After high school, instead of going to college to become a lawyer, I joined the US Air Force – to her annoyance. I ended up staying for 10 years, and it was at a base in Germany that I started singing. It was as natural as breathing. It was then that I came alive – it was like there was a fire inside me. I guess I realised that I really wanted to follow in her footsteps, to be a singer – and in some way gain her approval. But she'd so often say things that would hurt me and make me recoil. Mom was such an inspiring force in the US civil rights movement, but in one interview she did she talked about the problems she'd had with white folk, and referred to me as being 25% white as if it was something she resented. My father's father was white, but I was still her child. It was hard to swallow. Her comments were often irrational, but they'd still cause pain.

Eventually I did gain enough courage to start singing full time. I also found the courage to be stronger with Mom. I remember saying to her once: *'I can't carry on tiptoeing around you, trying to anticipate your mood swings. I'm tired of trying to make sense of all the situations you put me in. I don't like the way you treat me. I don't want you to manipulate my love for you any more. I don't want you to use me as a pawn for whatever it is you feel you have to do. I have a heart. I have feelings. I have hopes, just like you.'*

In 1998, I was pregnant with my third child, and I was living and working as a singer in Chicago. After five months of not seeing Mommy, she rang me up and asked me to be an opening act for her at the Albert Hall. It was too good to be true. Then she rang again, wanting me to apologise for something I hadn't done. If I didn't she threatened to pull me out of the show. She even threatened to pull out herself. In the end I did sing, but her management told me she didn't want me to be in the building when she performed, or to stay in a hotel anywhere near her. Yet the next day, she was joking and laughing with me. I never knew what to expect. It was her bipolar.

After a long battle with cancer, Mommy died in April 2003. What died with her was my fantasy of having the relationship with her I'd always wanted.

I grieved for the loss of that as much as I grieved for the loss of her. I've done a lot of processing of the pain I felt. I'm still doing it now. After her death, I realised our relationship was the best it was ever meant to be. As for her legacy, I hold that very dear. I honour her, I celebrate her brilliance, her genius. In that sense, her star shines as brightly as ever.

*Interview by Ria Higgins
from The Sunday Times*

Emotions
By Sarah Quinn

You are not the man I married,
Not the father of the baby I carried.
I find it hard to work you out.
You have no voice unless to shout.
You changed so many times in the years.
Precious moments of life you experienced in tears.

You are a stranger in our home,
You want to be by yourself, all alone.
You used to be my love, my soul mate,
So who are you, this man full of rage, full of hate?
You used to make me laugh until my sides split,
Now your laughter is full of venom, till you spit.

You scream at cars that pass you by,
You laugh at nothing until you cry.
I walk on eggshells less you break,
I hush my mouth for my own goodness sake.
The lights are on but no one's home,
I wait for salvation to come.

Salvation came for us just in time,
Our lives together had crossed a line.
You're still not you, but close enough,
At least you're calm and kind, not rough,
No up and down or round and round,
Just simply balanced, feet on the ground.

So here we are, still tight together,
We braved the sea, we battled the weather.
Our united front made a short road longer,
Our weakened bond is now made stronger.
So now I see you, as when we did marry,
My strange bipolar husband, Barry.

The above poem was sent to us by Sarah Quinn with the request that we publish it in our newsletter. We were very happy to do this. 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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