

MOODS

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Bipolar Disorder and Psychotherapy

By David Brody, MD

There is consensus among clinicians that psychotherapy plus medication treatment reduces symptoms of mood disorders more effectively than either treatment alone. However, there remains controversy about whether adding psychotherapy to medication treatment lowers the *risk of relapse* in individuals with bipolar disorder. This question has been addressed in several previous studies with no clear answer. In the October issue of *JAMA Psychiatry*, Dr. David Miklowitz, author of *The Bipolar Disorder Survival Guide: What You and Your Family Need to Know*, and his colleagues discuss their analysis of 39 published, randomized controlled trials (36 in adults, 3 in adolescents) that examined the effectiveness of combining psychotherapy and medication. Using sophisticated statistical methods, they concluded that, when added to medication treatment, family therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy and psychoeducational therapies were more effective in preventing manic and depressive episodes compared with other types of psychotherapy, what the au-

thors call “treatment as usual” (likely to consist of therapies that blend supportive and psychodynamic approaches). This report marks the first time that manualized psychotherapies (so-called because written manuals guide such treatments) have been shown to reduce the risk of relapse in bipolar disorder to a greater extent than more common forms of psychotherapy. This ought to put more pressure on psychiatrists to recommend (or to deliver) these specific psychotherapies and for insurance companies to ensure that their provider networks include psychotherapists trained to conduct family, cognitive behavioral and psychoeducational therapies.

That said, it is understood that only a minority of practicing psychotherapists possess the necessary training to offer manualized psychotherapy and, as such, accessing these treatments is difficult. Psychotherapists possessing these specialized skills typically do not participate in insurance networks. There is a growing awareness that we need novel mechanisms to deliver such treatments to patients with bipolar disorder, perhaps by leveraging the resources of primary

care practices, which often employ clinicians experienced in health education and family-focused care.

As behavioral health care research continues to identify effective – and even essential – treatments, it will become more important for patients and families to advocate for access to care. It is in the interest of both insurers and employers (the chief purchasers of health care insurance) to both reduce and prevent psychiatric hospitalization. Dr. Miklowitz’s research deserves to be discussed and promoted as one method of reaching these goals.

References:

Adjunctive Psychotherapy for Bipolar Disorder: A Systematic Review and Component Network Meta-analysis doi:[10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.2993](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.2993)

Beyond Efficacy and Toward Dissemination and Personalization of Psychotherapy for Bipolar Disorder doi:[10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.2980](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.2980)

David Brody is a medical advisory to MDSG and serves on the board of directors.

Chasing Normal, A Journey with Michael Hoffman

By Li Faustino, PhD

One of the rewarding aspects of MDSG is listening firsthand to how those who attend support groups progress over time. One such story is that of Michael Hoffman, the author of *Chasing Normal: My Peer Group Design for Living with Bipolar* and founder of the Meetup group *Meeting of the Minds—Mental Health Through Peer Support*.

While at MDSG, Michael facilitated groups, directed our sites, re-designed our website and served on our board of directors. Ivy-league educated and with a successful career, Michael writes an honest and forthcoming personal account of his journey through his mental health treatment, which led him to start his own peer support network and groups.

In *Chasing Normal*, Michael credits MDSG for facilitating his journey of self-acceptance, introspection and wellness. While this may be partially true, Michael's story shows that after he dared to go further than "scrape the surface" of his condition, his true self came to exist, and in some ways reappear in a better version. He also carefully cautions against viewing Bipolar as a natural "superpower" to run with exuberantly and with abandon. Michael models taking mood disorders seriously, and with self-compassion and acceptance.

Michael invites you on a journey into his head as he writes his innermost thoughts during his experience in the hospital, interacting with others he encountered, and on his way back to reclaim his life. He pieces together elements of his down moments, treatment failures, and positive moments so that he could develop a formula for becoming empowered to take hold of one's own treatment. He incorporates successful use of cognitive-behavioral therapy and peer support groups into clear and definitive steps that he describes in his book and employs in this own peer support network that he founded on his own after attending MDSG groups.

Chasing Normal is a raw and relatable read about a very difficult condition. It is a clear sharing of experience, the hallmark of peer support that empowers people to band together to help each other through the maze of treatment to recovery. It includes discussions of a less than perfect, but in fact much to be desired, mental health system and the positive role of MDSG, as well as other very helpful moments along Michael's journey.

Hoffman, Michael J. *Chasing Normal: My Peer Group Design for Living with Bipolar*. MPHG, Inc, 2020. 195p.

Li Faustino is chair of the MDSG board of directors.

Items of Interest

HealthyPlace.com. "What Recovery from Bipolar Disorder and Depression Means To Us"
<https://www.healthyplace.com/bipolar-disorder/articles/what-recovery-from-bipolar-disorder-and-depression-means-to-us>

HealthyPlace.com. "Mental Health Struggles Don't Take a Holiday"
<https://www.healthyplace.com/blogs/survivingmentalhealthstigma/2020/12/mental-health-struggles-dont-take-a-holiday>

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