

## MDSG's 30th Anniversary: An Interview With Betsy Naylor

This year marks the 30th Anniversary of the founding of the Mood Disorders Support Group. Throughout the year MOODS will feature interviews with some of our long-time members.

### Betsy, how did you get involved in MDSG?

I had a manic episode in 1993, and a social worker at St Vincent's suggested that I might find MDSG's groups helpful. I went to my first meeting at the Beth Israel site – which was exactly where it is now – and never stopped going.

### What did you think of that first meeting?

I had never seen so many Bipolar people in one room in my life! It was very comforting. And the groups were helpful, since they provided lots of information and I didn't feel so alone with my new diagnosis.

### Were groups different twenty years ago?

Not dramatically. They were

smaller in 1993 – maybe six or seven people in a group, instead of 25 – but the basic format was the same. Around 1996 MDSG merged with another mood disorder group, which became the Westside.

The issues people talk about in groups are pretty consistent: how awful they feel about themselves, the problems they have with friends and family when they can't keep up their end of the relationship, what they can do to help themselves get better.

### How did you become part of the leadership team?

Once I began to recover I started to think about becoming a group facilitator. That's how I got to know Howard Smith – through a year of pestering him about training! Back then training meant spending four evenings at Ivan Goldberg's apartment, learning about medication, diagnoses, and group dynamics. Now it

takes much longer, and includes how to handle problems and more detail about how to run a group.

### Is it unusual for people to stay involved with MDSG as long as you have?

Yes and no. MDSG is a real community, and some people have been here a very long time. Others arrive when they're having trouble, but after several months they (thankfully!) don't need us as much as before. We're glad to help anyone who needs support, even if it's only for a while.

### Has MDSG grown?

Oh yes, especially since we started using the Internet. We started our web site in about 2000, and as we've linked in to more bulletin boards and other sites we've seen a jump in the number of people attending lectures.

## Book Review, cont'd from page 3

ent in how his patients speak. As remission advances he hears them saying things like, "I joined the gym", "I started going to an art class" or "I decided to go out with friends more often." Their world gets bigger, their confidence stronger.

Dr. Hellerstein's confidence and optimism is contagious. He believes that the New Neuropsychiatry offers great hope and multiple paths to eliminate constant sadness,

low self esteem, and intrusive thoughts. You may remember him from the days when he ran the clinic where MDSG meets at Beth Israel. He has given several lectures for us, and we will hear him again on June 7 about *The New Neuropsychiatry*, the subject of *Heal Your Brain*.

*Heal Your Brain* is a kind of map to what good, up-to-date treatment looks like, and a primer on what current research tells us about

depression and recovery. Dr. Hellerstein has great compassion, and also insight. "Has suffering with (and through) your disorder tempered you," he challenges us, "Giving you greater compassion and understanding and perhaps even strengthening you against adversity?" With books like his to help us, the answer is more likely to be yes.



MDSG has a selection of helpful books on mood disorders available for purchase at our weekly meeting sites and monthly lectures.

MDSG, Inc.  
PO Box 30377  
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### STAY HEALTHY. KEEP MDSG HEALTHY

We all know it takes a huge amount of work to keep ourselves stable and healthy. MDSG plays a key role in supporting us in those efforts. The cost of membership and lecture admission doesn't come close to covering our expenses. Your financial support is crucial. Please give what you can.

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Serving people with depression and manic depression, their families and friends since 1981

## Weekly Support Groups

Doors open at 7:00 p.m.;  
groups begin at 7:30 p.m.

Manhattan West Side  
on Wednesdays  
St. Luke's Roosevelt  
Adult Outpatient  
Psychiatric Clinic

411 West 114th St (bet. Amsterdam and Morningside Aves.)

Manhattan East Side on  
Fridays  
Beth Israel Medical  
Center, Bernstein  
Pavilion, 2nd floor,

Nathan Perlman Place (bet. 15th & 16th Streets, First & Second Aves)

Support groups allow participants to share their thoughts, feelings and personal experiences in small, confidential gatherings. Separate groups are available for:

- newcomers
- unipolar (depressive)
- bipolar (manic depressive)
- Under-30s
- family members and friends.

Groups meet simultaneously. Support groups are free for members, and \$5 for nonmembers.

Find more resources online at [MDSG.ORG](http://MDSG.ORG)

## Upcoming Lecture

## Summer 2011

### Heal Your Brain

David Hellerstein, M.D.

Associate Professor of Clinical Psychiatry  
Director of Medical Communications, Columbia U. Department of Psychiatry,  
Research Psychiatrist, New York State Psychiatric Institute

Lecture: June 7



So you pick up the *Times* and there's yet another fMRI study of the brain. And you wonder, *When will this make a difference in my life?* Or you read about a research study about the

connectivity of neurons in the lateral habenula in rats and think, *What does this have to do with me?*

In days of yore, what happened in the lab had little or nothing to do with the practice of psychiatry. But that's changing, and fast. As technology advances – with MRIs, EEGs, neurocognitive tests and studies of neurons themselves – we're learning more about how real-world symptoms of anxiety and depression are related to what's happening in the brain.

The growing dialogue between neurology and psychiatry feeds into what Dr. David Hellerstein calls the New Neuropsychiatry. For as scientists start to understand some of the principles of how the brain works, that knowledge is feeding into clinical practices. And as specific clinical strategies show signs of success, that's prompting research.

So what is it that scientists are seeing

when they peer into the brain? For one thing, they can observe that the brain actually *changes* when someone is depressed. It's not your imagination: there really is reduced activity in the area that handles working memory and organizational skills. The portion of the brain that's believed to play a role in emotional self-control and problem solving is less active. The amygdala, or fear center, appears abnormal. But the good news is that whatever damage the brain shows during depression can often be reversed.

What can you do to help heal the damage done by depression and anxiety? The techniques the New Neuropsychiatry uses to facilitate this happy reversal are the subject of Dr. Hellerstein's new book, *Heal Your Brain* – and the topic of our upcoming lecture on June 7.

Dr. Hellerstein is a well-known researcher, a great friend of MDSG, and a member of our Board of Directors. His unfailing interest in the well-being of those with mood disorders is matched by his skill as a speaker. Come hear him discuss how what happens inside your brain (physically) is connected to what happens inside your head (emotionally), and how all of that links in to therapies and techniques that can help us get better, recover, and eventually heal.

## Ask the Lawyer Marc Strauss, Esq.

My sister has a Social Security Disability application filed, but now she's been evicted from her apartment and desperately needs help. Is there anything we can do to speed up her hearing?

Yes, there is. Social Security has a special category for what are called Dire Need cases. There are five specific situations under which a hearing may be expedited, two of which sometimes apply for mental health disability applications. Homelessness – the inability to obtain food, medical care or shelter – is one of them. The other is when there is evidence that the applicant is suicidal. Expedited action under these circumstances can be requested at the hearing level. An Administrative Law Judge could make a decision based on the medical records alone or a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge could be

expedited. The hearing office looks at these requests on a case to case basis to determine if a case should be marked "critical".

My lawyer told me that even though there are still long delays in processing Social Security Disability applications, there are some ways things have gotten better. What does she mean?

Social Security has now made it possible for attorneys to submit applications and evidence online, and to view your entire file on line. This has streamlined the application process considerably, since it used to take a lot of time and energy and phone calls. For obvious reasons, there are several layers of security needed to register to this service. Note that the system is only available to legal representatives, not individuals.

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All information in this newsletter is intended for general knowledge only and is not a substitute for medical or legal advice or treatment for a specific medical condition.

## An Outstanding History of Outstanding Lectures

Over the years MDSG has built a reputation for offering outstanding lectures by prominent speakers. Many of these have been recorded and are available for purchase; check the lectures page at MDSG.org for prices and information.

### Encouragement and Coping Skills

David J. Miklowitz, PhD  
Dwayne Mayes

Coping as an Individual and as a Family (Lecture #101)  
Don't Let it Get You Down! Resources For Building a Purposeful and Independent Life (#96)

Richard O'Connor, PhD

Undoing Depression: What Therapy Doesn't Teach You and Medication Can't Give You (#95)

Larry Fricks

We CAN Reclaim Our Lives: A Personal Journey to Hope and Recovery (#89)

### Innovative Treatments

Richard Carleton, MD  
Sarah Lisanby, MD

Foods That Trigger Mood Swings, Nutrients That Bring Relief  
Out of the Pillbox: Brain Stimulation for Medication Resistant Disorders (#84)

Michael Terman, PhD

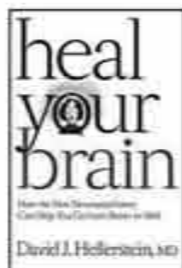
Light and Negative Air Ion Therapy: The Latest Treatments for SAD, sub-SAD and Depression Throughout the Year (#45)  
Social Rhythms Therapy (#22)

Ellen Frank PhD

## The Reader's Corner Betsy Naylor

*Heal Your Brain: How the New Neuropsychiatry Can Help You Go from Better to Well*

Dr. David Hellerstein, M.D.  
Johns Hopkins University  
Press. 2011



*Heal Your Brain* is perfect for MDSG readers. And there's a wide audience for this book beyond

those who suffer from mood disorders: psychiatrists, therapists, and the significant others who live with us and care how we are. *Heal Your Brain* is an engaging and understandable tour of what the author calls the New Neuropsychiatry, and it does a remarkable job of explaining how treatments have shifted because of modern research.

The "old" psychiatry often focused on early life issues, involving psychoanalysis that took you back to where problems began. But some people have been mining their history for years and still remain depressed. Talking about the past doesn't always change the present... or the future.

So the New Neuropsychiatry takes a different approach. The patient is asked to focus on the troubling circumstances in his life right now. The emphasis is on improving present-day symptoms, with a longer-term goal of remission and even recovery.

The title of the book, *Heal Your Brain*, arises from studies that show that depression and anxiety cause damage to certain parts of the brain – damage which we now know can be reversed, thanks to the brain's "plasticity" or ability to re-generate neurons.

The tools the New Neuropsychiatrist uses are broad, and may include a broad array of medication options, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mindfulness meditation, and a regular regimen of exercise.

Dr. Hellerstein has chosen a great way to take us through the many phases of treatment: he tells the real stories of some of his patients (who have been re-named for reasons of privacy).

He introduces us to Mark, who suffers from OCD which is ruining his life. There's Cindy, who arrives in his office suffering from severe postpartum depression, but whose diagnosis turns out to be more complicated than that. Allan's world is limited by his panic attacks, and when faced with treatment options decides not to tackle his symptoms with therapy and exercise – and without meds. And Lynette has treatment-resistant depression. We follow each of these people through the process of diagnosis, initial plan, revised plan, and recovery.

The day-to-day problems of the people in these vignettes illustrate many scenarios in the practice of

New Neuropsychiatry, and show how patient and doctor work together to figure out solutions and make decisions.

Dr. Hellerstein has a very special voice filled with empathy, and you'll enjoy (and perhaps see yourself in) these case studies. All the realities of living with a mental health disorder are here: side effects, the desire to stop taking meds, the debate over whether or not to have children.

I especially liked Dr. Hellerstein's definition of a path to health:

- As some symptoms begin to quiet down, it's called **improvement**.
- If about half of the symptoms are under control, that's **response**.
- When almost all symptoms are under control, you're in **remission**.
- And when there's continuing stability for four months or more, that's **recovery**.

Brain imaging has revealed that when the brain is in states of mood disorder, depression, panic, or anxiety it is not the way it is supposed to be. The pain center is bigger than normal, the pleasure center is smaller. As our symptoms lessen and we respond to treatment, our brains heal and actually revert to normal. Dr. Hellerstein notes that even without MRIs these changes are appar-

Continued on page 5

## The Mood Disorders Support Group Upcoming Lectures – Summer 2011

Held at the Podell Auditorium, Bernstein Pavilion, Beth Israel Medical Center  
Enter at Nathan Perlmutter Place between First and Second Avenues and 15th and 16th Street  
Doors open at 7:00 p.m., lectures begin at 7:30 p.m. \$4 for members, \$8 for non-members.

June 7  
Tuesday  
7:30 p.m.

David Hellerstein, M.D.

Associate Professor of Clinical  
Psychiatry

Director of Medical Communications,  
Columbia U. Department of Psychiatry,

Research Psychiatrist, New York State  
Psychiatric Institute

Heal Your Brain

Dr. Hellerstein will explain how research and treatment increasingly connect, and how the New Neuropsychiatry can help you recover from depression and anxiety.

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Membership in MDSG gives you FREE admission to support groups and a discount on all lectures