

# MOODS

Serving People with Unipolar and Bipolar Illness, Their Families and Friends, since 1981

September 2020

## MDSG-NY Expands Its Support to the East End of Long Island

By Tory Masters, CPS, CPRP

As a dedicated 30-year attendee, peer group facilitator, facilitator trainer and board member of MDSG NY, it was a bitter sweet decision to move with my husband full time to Southampton, Long Island 8 years ago. Though I am very involved helping manage the organization from afar, I miss volunteering regularly at our sites at both Beth Israel and St. Luke's Roosevelt Hospitals (both now renamed Mount Sinai). I miss the camaraderie, the energy and the intimacy of joining individuals every week. Just as peers once helped me, even save me, I need to do the same for others.

My research of local peer-led mental health support groups in my area discovered that the need for peer support on the east end of Long Island that was not being met. "Build it, they will come!"

In 2016 I met with Robert Chaloner, the Chief Administrative Officer of Stonybrook/Southampton Hospital who told me that mental health support was a priority and provided me with the space and resources I needed to get started. The East End Mood Disorder Support Group (EEMDSG) was launched.

Over the last four years we have steadily grown. The local mental health community has embraced us. New facilitators are being identified and trained. And I again can bring my decades of experience, my certifications as a

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## Resilience and COVID

By David Hellerstein, MD

We all know how difficult life has become in the past six months, since Covid-19 began to have devastating impact on the entire world.

As a practicing psychiatrist I have spent many hours helping patients deal with social isolation, loss of income, health issues and innumerable other consequences of the pandemic. Unsurprisingly, many people report worsening anxiety, insomnia, depression and other symptoms. Treatment has included additional therapy sessions, adjusting medications, etc.

However, as attested by many of my fellow

**One person told me, "I actually feel better."**

psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and other therapists, it has become apparent that many patients have done unusually *well* in the context of these unprecedented stresses. Rather than more symptoms, some people have *fewer*. As one person told me, 'I actually feel *better*. It's as though I've been preparing for this my whole life, and it's almost a relief that it is finally happening.' Another patient described a sense of community since Covid-19 stresses and suffering was shared by so many others, rather than hers to bear alone. For others, a life of social isolation, being home-bound with rare excursions to stores and pharmacies, is actually nothing new, and therefore brings little deprivation. 'This is *already* my life,' another patient told me. 'For me, there's really nothing different about it.'

Another aspect, confirmed in discussions

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## Resilience and COVID

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with many of my patients and fellow psychiatrists and psychologists is that pandemic life calls upon coping strategies already familiar to people with diagnoses of major depression, panic disorder, or bipolar disorder. In a way, the need to deal with symptoms, traumas, and losses may have led them to develop strengths that can be called upon in times like this. Over many years of struggle, they have become experts in structuring solitary time, spending time in meditation, exercise, and reaching out to others virtually when face-to-face visits are impossible. So too, they have evolved strategies to deal with psychic consequences of isolation and stress—negative thoughts, ruminations, pessimism, physical anxiety, insomnia, etc.—and for tolerating, even enjoying, long periods of solitude.

The resilience developed over years of disorder is now being tested, and often helps significantly, whereas their friends and neighbors without similar skills may be floundering. Furthermore, they may already be connected to social networks such as MDSG, which provide community with others diagnosed with mood disorders, which alleviate the isolation that has ballooned with social distancing. And, of course, many have long

-established treatment relationships with therapists and psychiatrists, allowing a transition to Zoom-based treatments, in contrast to people without psychiatric histories who may find treatment difficult to obtain since so many clinics and programs have either shut down or have reduced capacity.

All that said, it is clear that we live in extremely difficult times. Since the start of the pandemic, domestic violence has soared, the suicide rate has risen, as has substance abuse, and violent crime. Political unrest and economic insecurity have led to additional levels of stress and risk, as has the consequences of Covid-19 infection, including grief for the loss of loved ones, and a host of difficulties for those surviving infection, who may have ongoing medical consequences.

Nevertheless, I am struck by the way in which hard-won strategies for dealing with psychiatric disorders have enabled so many people to cope productively with the pandemic, and in a way to become leaders in the process of defining and optimizing survival skills in the age of Covid-19.

And believe me, our society needs help in this regard.

*Dr. Hellerstein is a medical advisor to MDSG and is a MDSG Board member.*

## Item of Interest

Hoffman, Michael J. [Chasing Normal: My Peer Group Design for Living with Bipolar.](#) MPHG, Inc., 2020. 212 p.

Michael Hoffman, a former MDSG facilitator, tells his very personal story of living with and fighting his bipolar illness. He also describes his peer group model, which differs from that used by MDSG.

Mood Disorders Support Group  
New York

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trained Peer Specialist and Psychiatric Rehabilitation Practitioner to the hands-on work of peer support. That's the reward.

I am very excited that such a respected organization as MDSG-NY has decided to endorse EEMDSG and extend the organization's reach of support to the South Fork of Long Island.

We offer:

A confidential peer-led group for individuals with a mental health disorder

A confidential peer-led group for family and friends of a loved one who is struggling

Groups are run by trained peer facilitators

When: Thursday evenings from 6:30-8pm

Where: Due to Covid-19, we are running only virtual zoom groups

Where: When we return to post-Covid in-person groups

Stonybrook/Southampton Hospital  
Ed and Phyllis Davis Wellness Institute  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
240 Meeting House Lane  
Southampton, New York

Contact information:

<https://southampton.stonybrookmedicine.edu/services/mental-health>

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*Tory Masters is vice-chair of the MDSG Board.*