



NAMI Mercer focuses on wellness and recovery.

By Madeline Monheit and Elisabeth Hagen

In 1990, the U.S. Congress designated the first week of October as Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW). This year, however, NAMI Mercer's MIAW activities will not focus on mental *illness*. Rather, we will center our outreach efforts on ***wellness and recovery***.

According to the *National Consensus Statement* issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in 2004, "recovery is the single most important goal" for America's mental healthcare system. In the same report, HHS also redefined recovery as a "journey of healing and transformation" that is personal, continual, and holistic, encompassing one's mind, body, and spirit.

On Saturday, Oct. 10, "Harvest of Hope: Recovering from Mental Illness," NAMI Mercer's first educational conference for mental health consumers and their families, will embrace this new vision for recovery as a process, not always linear, that enables a person with a mental health problem to achieve individual goals and find meaning in life.

To be held at the Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville, the conference will offer workshops that promote the fundamental building-blocks of recovery outlined in the Consensus Statement: self-direction, individualism, empowerment, holism, responsibility, respect, and hope. Speakers will show consumers and their families how to capitalize on personal strengths and the support of their peers.

"Medication alone is not sufficient treatment for any mental illness," states Princeton psychiatrist and NAMI Mercer Board President Dr. William P. Hayes, who will co-teach a wellness workshop at the conference. According to Dr. Hayes, eating nutritious foods, exercising, practicing stress management techniques, and sharing positive relationships with friends and family also are essential.

"When you are optimally healthy," explains Dr. Hayes, "your body is better equipped to perform self-repair, helping you to recover from both mental and physical illness."

"With psychiatric illnesses, it's crucial to keep up a sense of hope and strive for wellness," adds Executive Director Sally Osmer. While NAMI Mercer does not provide medical treatment for mental illness, its education and support programs help

consumers to adopt the healthy lifestyle necessary for recovery. NAMI also coaches families on how to exert a constructive influence on their loved ones in recovery.

“We know people will have a more positive recovery if the family can be steady, resilient and flexible through the long haul,” adds Osmer. The October conference seeks to help mental health consumers and their families learn more about the components of recovery and gain new skills that will lead to wellness.

NAMI offers free wellness education and peer-support programs on a regular basis.

Hearts and Minds and Weight Management Support Group

Research has demonstrated that people living with severe psychiatric conditions may have an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, and related conditions. For reasons not well understood, many anti-psychotic drugs cause serious weight gain. These two NAMI programs offer tips on exercise and diet and provide opportunities for peer support.

Wellness and Recovery Action Plan (WRAP)

Studies have shown that people who take responsibility for their own wellness achieve the highest levels of stability and recovery. WRAP was developed by educator and mental health advocate Dr. Mary Ellen Copeland to help persons with chronic mental or physical illness stay on the path to wellness. WRAP teaches people to recognize the triggers and symptoms of their illness and to focus on positive supports. WRAP is a 10-session course during which the individual develops a personal wellness and recovery plan.

Just Friends

Psychologists say that like food, we all need friends to survive. This peer-managed social group, established more than 20 years ago, meets several times a month providing its members with fun and friendship. **Becoming Friends** is a new social group that meets bi-monthly with recreational activities for younger consumers ages 18-30.

For more information about the NAMI Mercer conference or programs, go to www.namimercer.org or call our Helpline at 609-799-8994. NAMI Mercer, New Jersey’s largest affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is a non-profit organization of individuals and families working to improve the lives of persons affected by mental illness through education, advocacy, and mutual support.

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