Dear Reader,

It is our pleasure to bring you this Winter installment of our Free Associations newsletter! First off, we would like to welcome to the editorial staff Dr. Maryam Soltani, MD PhD. Apart from being a brilliant neuroscientist, physician, and plumber, Maryam is also a skilled artist. We are pleased not only for her collaboration but also to feature her artwork.

In this edition we are pleased to bring you articles about conferences attended by our residents, interesting biological correlates of behaviors, and of course, original artwork.

This edition of Free Associations comes to you in the midst of the holiday season. On the heels of Thanksgiving and on the eve of many other holidays, it is absolutely a time to reflect on the people most important in our lives. We have each of us no doubt expanded our families and friendships, with each new member in our lives bringing new and exciting experiences.

Here at UCSD Psychiatry, we represent a multitude of backgrounds and cultures. During this holiday season, whether you will be celebrating Christmas, Hanukkah, Ramadan, Diwali, Kwanza, or simply the New Year, we here at Free Associations hope that you will be surrounded by family, friends, happiness, and joy.

From all of us at Free Associations, we thank you for reading!

-Chaitanya, Jessica, Maryam, and Sanjai

I've got to admit it's getting better. It's a little better all the time.
Paul McCartney

In a 2012 address to other Psychiatry Training Directors, Rick Summers, then president of the American Association of Directors of Psychiatric Residency Training (AADPRT), told the story of the “good-old days” of inpatient milieu therapy, when psychiatric staff expressed their ironic self-awareness in a joke that made everyone laugh upon hearing it the first few times. “What is the difference between the staff and the patients?” And after a pregnant pause, “We expect the patients to get better!”

Paraphrasing Rick, the Department of Psychiatry at UCSD is a remarkable organization and it’s been a great personal and professional pleasure to serve as its Residency Program Director for the past 20 years. And, I think we are getting better!

Several years ago, we experienced a significant slump. Residents felt overwhelmed by the amount of patient care and they pretty much universally believed that service demands were trumping educational opportunities. Resident burnout was palpable, and on annual anonymous surveys, some residents even expressed regrets about training at UCSD. To repair these faults, we formed a “Resident Morale Committee”, chaired by our then Executive Vice-Chair, and now our new Chair, Igor Grant, and comprised of a broad representation of faculty and senior residents.

Many very positive changes emerged, directly and indirectly, from the committee’s efforts, including, but not limited to: increased social support at both major teaching hospitals (believe it or not, neither UCSD Hospital nor the VA had a social worker in the ED prior to the Morale Committee’s efforts); markedly decreased case loads in the outpatient service (OPS) (from over 150 patients per resident to about half that many) and increased supervision…

Continued on Page 6
Free Associations
Staff

This year, thanks to members of San Diego Psychiatric Society, five psychiatry residents from UCSD were able to attend the California Psychiatric Association annual meeting in Yosemite, CA. Residents attended conference programming on a variety of subjects including subjects such as neuropsychological testing, medical updates for psychiatrists, dealing with agitated patients, and Laura’s law. Along with the variety of educational sessions residents were able to attend the legislative lunch where they heard from Assemblywoman Susan Talamentes Eggman. APA Inc hosted a reception for residents and students during which time residents from UCSD were able to network with trainees from other California residency and fellowship programs. The conference provided exposure to advocacy as they learned about some of the important subjects in mental health policy in the California and attended the CPA PAC reception where they met practicing psychiatrists across California. The residents who attended would like to thank those who provided financial support for them to attend the CPA annual meeting where they enjoyed professional growth through education, networking, and exposure to leaders in California mental health policy. Please see the following reflections from award recipients.

An update from the legislative lunch by Nate Miller, MD PGY1 UCSD:
The California Psychiatric Association awarded Presidential Commendations to Nick and Amanda Wilcox for their work over the last decade advocating for mental health issues. After the tragic death of their daughter, they tirelessly worked on…

Continued on Page 3

California Psychiatric Association
By Rachel Robitz, MD

Nature is weirder than anything you can think up. The idea that our behavior might be influenced by the panoply of microorganisms that live in us and on us, seems weird, if not creepy. But witness the story of Toxoplasmosis Gondi. Rats normally avoid cats; they avoid the odor of cat urine. However, cats infected with T. gondi are attracted to cat urine and to cats. Rats that normally would cling to the sides of a space now charge cats. Consider now, that though toxoplasmosis can live in rats, it can only reproduce in cats. And consider what happens when a rat charges a cat. Yes, toxo is now back in its preferred host, yum!

How has this happened? Did toxo influence the rat’s behavior? Examination of the toxo genome has identified copies of the gene for tyrosine hydroxylase, the rate-limiting enzyme in norepinephrine and dopamine synthesis. This suggests that the rats charge the cats because they are rats on meth, with excessive dopamine synthesis due to an overactive tyrosine hydroxylase. It further suggests that toxo acquired the gene from a mammalian host and that those toxo that carried the TH gene enjoyed a selective advantage over those who did not. Does toxo influence human behavior? Do other microorganisms cause mental illnesses by similarly influencing our behavior? Will we be treating psychosis with antibiotics? It sure took the ulcer doctors by surprise.

Then there are the post infection autoimmune syndromes such as Sydenham’s chorea and NMDA encephalitis.

Genetic studies of schizophrenia have made great progress over the last few years with over 100 genes identified with a high level of certainty. The strongest evidence across the entire genome for association to schizophrenia is in the HLA region on chromosome 6 (p<10⁻³⁰). Though it is not certain it is an HLA type that predisposes to schizophrenia, it does strongly support infectious or autoimmune mechanisms in psychosis. This is an evolving story with much more information needed. But it does make me wonder, was it me or my bacteria that made me eat that extra piece of pie?

Toxoplasmosis Gondi
By John Kelsoe, MD

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improving mental health access through Laura's law. The law, passed in 2002, seeks to fill a gap in services by being able to require outpatient services under certain circumstances.

For example individuals that require anti-psychotics but not necessarily inpatient hospitalization. While already passed at the state level, it must be approved on a county by county basis. The law has recently been implemented in San Francisco and Los Angeles Counties and may be approved in San Diego by the County Supervisors within the next year. Stay tuned ...

A review of a session from the conference on ethics in psychotherapy by Aryan Fotros, MD PGY1 UCSD: A frequently ambiguous area confronted in psychiatry is maintaining appropriate boundaries while maintaining an empathetic environment. A principal rule that helps to minimize this gray zone is to prioritize the best interest of the patient and assess therapist's motive. Boundary violations are often non-malicious in nature, and can represent manifestations of subconscious feelings towards the patient, or the therapist. For example, if a patient asks for a hug while recalling childhood abuse, it is important for the therapist to consider if fulfilling such a request will truly serve therapeutic purposes. Violation of sexual boundaries are particularly harmful, and can leave the moral blame entirely on the therapist. Boundary violations, despite often being due to no more than a confusion between the providers need and that of the patient, can often lead to serious harm to the patient. Strategies to avoid such repercussions include avoiding minor boundary violations and continuous self review with tools such as the "Exploitation Index," along with discussion of cases with colleagues and supervisors.

A Resident’s IPS Experience
By Jessica Thackaberry, MD

With all of the challenges facing America’s mental health systems today, the 2014 Institute for Psychiatric Services was a welcomed and timely conference for a resident to attend. I had the honor of attending this year’s conference, not only as a presenter and panelist, but also as a hopeful future community psychiatrist, looking forward to getting my chance to make a difference in mental health policy and public psychiatry. This being my second year attending this conference, I always hope to be inspired and charged with a new outlook on my psychiatric practice, and this year I was not disappointed.

I attended several impressive sessions this year, the most memorable of which being a talk about Adverse Childhood Experiences by Dawn Griffin, PhD and Lawrence Malak, MD, a screening of the documentary "Voices" which was made by Gary Tsai, MD, a talk focusing on implementation of Laura’s Law by Rod Shaner, MD and author of Laura’s Law, Helen Thompson, and a symposium on inspiring residents and early career psychiatrists to work with the disenfranchised members of our communities. I will describe each of these sessions in brief.

Drs. Griffin and Malak made an eloquent presentation of the data from the ACE study, showing that early childhood trauma effects all aspects of a person’s life and should be taken into account in developing treatment plans and in interactions with any individual in our practices. The documentary “Voices” follows three different individuals who experience auditory hallucinations, interviewing their families and those who interact with them on a daily basis, to try to better understand the experience of Schizophrenia and reduce stigma of mental illness. Helen Thompson and Dr. Shaner did an excellent job explaining the implementation of Laura’s Law in select counties in California, as well as detailing the remaining obstacles from further implementation of this important law which would allow intensive treatment for patients who suffer from serious mental illness, and allow for it to be court ordered when necessary.

Lastly I was a member of a panel led by Stephen Goldfinger, MD, involving both residents and ECPs who work with the homeless, and why we do such important work. I had a chance to tell my story of how I became interested in this field and what drew me to work with the most underserved population we serve. Hearing the other panelists tell their stories gave inspiration to continue my work, and hope that there continue to be new voices and ideas in upcoming generations of psychiatrists to try to improve the services we provide this population.

In addition to being inspired and taught by these…

Continued on Page 4
Neuroscience in Psychiatry

On December 4th, the UC San Diego Psychiatry Residency program engaged in an interactive didactic session to remind its residents about basic neuroscience, anatomy, and function. The learning module involved a hands-on experience led by Dr. Sidney Zisook, Dr. Sanjai Rao, and Dr. Alana Iglewicz of the RTO. Using play-doh, residents constructed "scale" models of human brains, identified regions based on form, function, and illness. Below are some of the winning designs!

Thank you to our RTO leaders for continuing to search out innovative and entertaining learning opportunities for us to continue to enjoy!

A Resident’s IPS Experience

Continued from Page 3

experts in community psychiatry, I had the opportunity to meet and network with leaders in this growing field, and to walk away feeling like I can make a difference in the future. I will look forward to attending this conference each year, and to making a difference in mental health for years to come.
Trapped

Sitting in a room
I’m paralyzed by my thoughts
Not a soul around

Haunted by my mind
I try to get through the day
Fifteen hours passed

I look at the clock
In red it says 3:00 AM
Alone and awake

I can’t help but think
My soul has been stripped away
What’s left is a shell

How did I get here?
When can I finally leave?
Is it up to me?

Maryam Soltani, MD, PhD
PGY1, Combined Psychiatry & Family Medicine
What does SDPS Membership do for me?
Highlighting Membership Benefits

Laura Marrone, MD and Desiree Shapiro, MD, Co-Membership Chairs

Every month, we highlight three key benefits of SDPS, CPA, and APA membership. For a more comprehensive list of membership benefits, perks, and resources, please go to our website at http://www.sandiegopsychiatricsociety.org/membership/membership-benefits

1) Education and CME opportunities: SDPS and the APA provide several instructional and education opportunities throughout the year. APA is now offering CME modules on the HIV-related mental health relevant topics such as “HIV and Anxiety Disorders” and “Psychosis and HIV” among others. Please visit APA’s Learning Management Website for details at http://www.psychiatry.org/learn

2) Mentorship and supervision: SDPS is now offering a regular supervision series called Early Career Psychiatrist Case Consultation Group. The next meeting is 7-9PM on Tuesday, January 27th with Kathleen Erwin, MD at the Coastal Psychiatric Medical Associates, Inc. outpatient offices. These meetings will continue to be held every other month throughout the year. Please contact Janelle at janelle.kistler@sandiegopsychiatricsociety.org to receive future invitations.

3) Maintenance of Certification (MOC) Talk: Jonathan Meyer will be giving a talk and tutorial on Maintenance of Certification requirements and procedures. This opportunity is free for current members! The talk is Saturday, January 31 at MHS, Inc. Information and more details can also be found on our website home page under “Upcoming Events,” http://www.sandiegopsychiatricsociety.org/ To attend, please RSVP to Janelle Kistler at janelle.kistler@sandiegopsychiatricsociety.org

4) Policy Finder: There is a new search tool on the APA website called “PolicyFinder.” As explained on the APA website, the APA adopts position statements and other policy documents to address mental illness and substance use disorder concerns as well as to advocate for policies and resources which support and advance the profession and enhance the well-being of our patients. This tool provides an easy way for members to access and review official APA positions. For more information go to the APA website http://www.psychiatry.org/advocacy--newsroom/position-statements

Given multiple benefits, membership comes at a low cost. Consider this calculation. The daily cost of an annual membership that includes extra contributions for

Continued at right...

What does SDPS Membership do for me?

Continued from left...

APA-PAC comes out to $5.20/day. This is less than the cost of a large mocha and a pastry. Without the additional Political Action Committee contribution, daily cost of a membership is likely at or less than the cost of your favorite coffee drink!

Director’s Corner Continued...

(From <10% of patients ever meeting with or being regularly staffed with an attending to almost 100% currently); dramatically increased opportunities to observe faculty interviewing patients and to be observed interacting with patients on most services and didactics; more teachers and in-house supervisors on NBMU, PEC (now MHAC) and the OPS; a much more coordinated and comprehensive didactic series; a “float” call system, initially for PGY2s and then for PGY1s and PGY3s; decreased call for PGY1s and PGY2s and increased teaching on call and float for PGY1s; paid internal moonlighting (which we hope to maintain); and the addition of an additional Associate Training Director, Alana Iglewicz, to coordinate our psychotherapy training program, among her many other clinical and teaching contributions. In addition, since the Morale Committee’s final report, we have brought on several new faculty who love to teach (eg, Nick Mellos and Brian Tobe at the VA, Louisa Steiger and Vanessa Lauzon at NBMU, Steve Koh and Larry Malak at OPS); incorporated state-of-the-art psychotherapy supervision in each of our PGY2 continuity clinics; added attractive community electives for PGY3s and PGY4s, started new Fellowships (eg, Community Psychiatry, Addiction Psychiatry and, most recently, Psychosomatic Medicine), enhanced and received funding for our Psychiatry Research Training Track, and have appointed Neal Swerdlow to our brand new Vice-Chair for Education and Training position.

Are we where we want to be? Not yet. But with residents working side by side with faculty and the department leadership, we are getting there. (An aside here – if self-improvement is a goal, we are never quite where we want to end up; it is a process and we want to be on the right trajectory). I am delighted that we have a strong commitment from our new department leadership to continue to make things better for our trainees and training program. As we transition from the “old” to the “new” regimen, we have a renewed opportunity to examine where we came from, where we have been, where we are and where we want to go. Again, the Department’s Executive Vice-Chair, now Robert Anthenelli, and Neal Swerdlow are co-chairing a newly formed “Resident-Centered Task Force”, comprised of the residency training leadership and 2 residents from each training year, to help us take the next giant steps towards becoming the best training program we can be. The Committee is taking the recommendations from the most recent resident retreat as its starting point for assessing strengths and areas for improvement and is committed to implementing and/or recommending improvements. So far, all committee members have been refreshingly forthright and responsive to their constituencies’ concerns. I am absolutely convinced that the Department will fully support the Committee’s final recommendations. This commitment and dedication to excellence, from the residents, the faculty, the department leadership and Chair makes me incredibly proud to be where I am. I have to admit, it’s getting better. A little better all the time.