

NEW RESEARCH TO REDUCE STIGMA AMONG CAREGIVERS

New National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)-funded research aims to lessen the stigma that family members experience as a result of caring for a family member with schizophrenia.

Studies have indicated that family members who care for a relative with a severe mental illness such as schizophrenia commonly feel isolated and stigmatized, adding burden to an already difficult situation and often resulting in the caregiver withdrawing from social supports and developing depression. Deborah Perlick, PhD, of Mount Sinai School and Medicine, Jim Seltzer, Ph.D., MBA and Ann Nelson, RN of the Connecticut chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI-CT) are collaborating to research, develop and conduct follow-up evaluation on a new NAMI peer support program called In Our Own Voice-Family Companion (IOOV-FC). The research project is designed to reduce the impact of stigma on caregivers and the intervention is being modeled after the widely accepted consumer program - In Our Own Voice. IOOV-FC peer groups will be facilitated by trained members of the group itself.

The researchers intend to recruit 180 family caregivers who are caring for a relative with schizophrenia to participate in the trial. The participants will be randomly assigned to either the IOOV-FC group or to one of two control groups, in which a family education course is delivered by an expert. One of the control groups will include information on stigma, and the other will not. The outcomes of each support group will be evaluated and compared to determine if and to what extent the IOOV-FC program reduces self-stigma and social withdrawal behavior among caregivers.

This grant is being funded under the NIMH Program Announcement: Reducing Mental Illness and Discrimination. This announcement (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAR-07-156.html>) has currently been expired, but will be reissued shortly. Recently, another grant project was funded under this announcement: "New Collaboration Evaluates Effectiveness of Mental Illness Educational Project" (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/science-news/2007/new-collaboration-evaluates-effectiveness-of-mental-illness-educational-project.shtml>).