

When I called the Mood Disorders Ass. of B.C. to ask Robert for permission to reproduce this article on the back of my MM program the editor told me Robert was unavailable *because he, Dr. Long, and 10 of his patients were vacationing in Hawaii !!*

*Bruce Saunders
Mar 98*

NEW PSYCHIATRY INCLUDES REDISCOVERY OF FUN by Robert Winram

There is a tremendous value to developing an activity program linked to a psychiatric practice. I know because over 10 years ago, my psychiatrist and I worked together to create a consumer club among his patients. Since then I have had the satisfaction of seeing hundreds of his patients enjoy themselves as they were socializing their way to better health.

The improvement in my health could only be described as spectacular. Now I've had 10 years without a hospitalization while in the preceding three years I had over 250 days of hospital care.

How did it happen? The first step was a revision of my medications and a second opinion from my doctor, Dr. Phil Long. He listened carefully to me, and introduced a new mood stabilizer. However, I'm sure without the rebuilding of my confidence, my sense of self worth and usefulness, I might well have continued to flounder even with the new medications.

Our first activity was a soccer game at Sunset Beach. I knew a number of people with the illness because of my lengthy hospital stays. I invited them while Dr. Long invited a number of his patients. He also brought his wife and children. I was particularly impressed at the time that he so freely introduced us to his family. It was really fun.

One activity seemed to encourage another. Soon we had picnic blankets for those who weren't as active and people took turns bringing the snacks. When fall began we moved to a school gym for volleyball. I kept the volleyball and the net so it was essential that I be there every Thursday of 6:30 pm.

Fulfilling this responsibility was important to me. It was amazing at the time, in a slightly manic state, how difficult it was for me to be on time on a regular basis. Phoning others to encourage them to come out to one of our events began to take a lot of my time. I would phone two or three reminders to people as close as 15 or 30 minutes before the activity was to start. People responded with a lot of interest. I had been entrusted with all the phone numbers and this encouraged a sense of responsibility and usefulness.

We were always on the lookout for ways to have fun. Where there were activities in the community that had been planned and organized by others, we would just join in like everyone else. The Sun Fun Runs, The Tall Ships, Tuesday night movies, fireworks displays, free tickets to concerts or sporting events. Each time we went out we shared with each other, encouraged each other and began to regain our confidence as we practiced using and developing our social skills.



Robert Phil.

From the doctor's medical point of view, bringing his patients together at one time was a very efficient way for him to see how people were progressing. At almost every meeting someone would want a few minutes to review a medication requirement or to talk about side effects or a specific concern. In a moment a club member could be reassured and issues could be dealt with on the spot ... without needing to wait for the next appointment.

Dr. Long bought a 15 passenger van that enabled us to travel together on ski trips, visits to other cities for runs, Long Beach for camping, Whistler, and more. The van also made it possible for Dr. Long to bring along his patients when he was asked to speak. He frequently would ask his patients to speak with him about their experiences. It's flattering to be asked to share your ideas.

We saved and, our group of 14 with the help of sponsors, made trips to San Francisco, Disneyland and Hawaii. On our first trip to San Francisco I asked everyone there (14) how long it had been since they had had a vacation. The average time was 10 years. No wonder these illnesses can be so difficult to overcome when there often is no relief from the suffering.

Our group brought people together in an informal way. It helped us to develop trust in each other and our physician. It certainly has been one of the cornerstones of my recovery.

The relaxed, informal, yet respectful relationship that we all developed with each other is something that is worth encouraging. I hope other physicians will build on the model that worked so well for Dr. Long.

If you want to congratulate Philip Long you can leave a message on his web page, another cool project :
<http://www.mentalhealth.com>, MDA can be reached at 2730 Commercial Drive, Suite 201, Vancouver, B. C. V5N 5P4 tel: 604-873-3095 Fax: 604-3095 E-Mail: mda@lynx.bc.ca Two introductory newsletters can be received free.