



**Mood  
Disorders  
Association  
of  
Ontario**

# EQUILINK *news*

THE EQUILINK NEWSLETTER IS PRODUCED BY THE  
MOOD DISORDERS ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO (MDAO)

## Back to School With Bipolar? How University Can Unleash Mania

By Michele Hoos

Health.com (<http://goo.gl/SOOXY3>)

The rituals of university—making new friends, studying until dawn, excessive partying—can stress out any young adult. But students with bipolar disorder, or those at risk for the condition, are even more vulnerable in a college environment. Academic pressures, social concerns, and sleep disruptions can lead to bouts of depression as well as mania, the euphoric, revved-up state characteristic of bipolar disorder. Without the right treatment and support, bipolar students may face higher dropout rates, drug and alcohol abuse, and even suicide.

“The new structure and new stresses for [bipolar] students who leave home to go to school sometimes can trigger problems and relapses,” says Richard Kadison, MD, the chief of mental health services at Harvard University

and the author of *College of the Overwhelmed: The Campus Mental Health Crisis and What to Do About It*. These stresses, he adds, can also trigger mania in students who have an underlying vulnerability to bipolar disorder. “Often times, the first manic episode occurs in college,” Dr. Kadison says.

At its most severe, bipolar disorder is a dangerous condition that can lead to psychotic episodes and hospitalization. Milder forms of the disorder can cause problems as well, and can interfere with academic success. A 2006 study in the *Journal of Affective Disorders* compared a group of bipolar adults with a group of healthy adults who had similar IQs and social backgrounds. More than 60% of both groups entered college, but their achievements differed greatly: Nearly half of the control group



received a college degree, compared to just 16% of the bipolar group.

Students with bipolar disorder can survive—and even thrive—in university, but doing so requires a plan. Taking the proper medications, arranging for the appropriate counseling and medical care on campus, avoiding drugs and alcohol, maintaining a steady sleep and study schedule, and finding sources of peer support are all crucial and can make the difference between achieving your goals and dropping out.

Continued on page 2...



## SAVE THE DATE!

The Mood Disorders Association of Ontario will hold its Annual General Meeting on Wednesday, September 18th at 5:30pm at the Central YMCA (20 Grosvenor S., Toronto). All are welcome, and members who have paid their fees by September 16th will be eligible to vote during the business meeting.

Our special guest this year, Dr. David Goldbloom, MD, FRCPC; Senior Medical Advisor, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and Professor of Psychiatry, University of Toronto; will speak on “The Mental Health Commission of Canada: Looking Back and Looking Forward.”

# A breeding ground for bipolar symptoms

(Continued from Page 1)

Jennifer, 23, was diagnosed with bipolar disorder during her senior year of high school, but it wasn't until she left the support of her family and went away to university that the disease threatened her life.

During the first weeks of the year, she felt isolated and alone. She quit the soccer team and stopped going to classes. She started to stockpile medications and alcohol. In October, she drove to a nearby apple orchard, downed the pills and alcohol, and passed out. She woke up in the hospital after spending three days in a coma. (A passerby had seen her taillights, found her unconscious, and rushed her to the hospital.) Jennifer says she remembers being angry to be alive.

"I kept telling my family and friends that I was OK, but I was planning my suicide," says Jennifer, who is now a healthy student in her final year. "I had so much support back home—and then, in this new place, I didn't even know where the counseling center was."

Numerous aspects of university life can trigger a manic or depressive episode. Sleep deprivation and the keeping of irregular hours—both common practices on campus—are known to trigger mania, while binge drinking and the use of substances such as marijuana can cause depression. Stress, whether it stems from the pressure to succeed academically or to fit in socially, can trigger mania as well. According to Russell Federman, PhD, the director of Counseling and Psychological Services at the University of Virginia student health center, the desire to fit in and conform to the college lifestyle can cause some bipolar students to abandon healthy behaviours—even their medications.

University life often reveals the symptoms of bipolar disorder for the first time, particularly for those at risk of the condition who have not yet been diagnosed. (The university years, in fact, overlap with the stage in life in which bipolar disorder typically first appears—between 19 and 23 years old, according to some estimates.)

James experienced his first manic episode at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Whaley's lifestyle was less than healthy: In college he smoked a lot of marijuana and experimented with hallucinogenic mushrooms and a drug similar to LSD. He had a serious depressive episode his first year, and then, in the winter of his second year, he entered a full-blown manic episode with psychosis. "I thought I was having an existential breakthrough, but it was really a manic high," Whaley says.

James says that the symptoms of bipolar disorder do not appear spontaneously. "The lifestyle irregularities and the stresses of college life don't in and of themselves cause bipolar disorder," he explains. "You need a genetic vulnerability for bipolar disorder to emerge. But if you've got that vulnerability, the lifestyle irregularities of the first and second year of college can certainly be a precipitant."

## Strategies for managing bipolar disorder

Students who have been diagnosed with a bipolar spectrum disorder can take steps to minimize the risk of a relapse and stay balanced. Perhaps the most important step is to make sure you have a support system at school, which usually means connecting with the medical and counseling staff on campus. Students who attend school away from home may choose to maintain contact with their existing psychiatrist, but experts urge students to also make contact with campus health services.

"Even if a student with bipolar disorder has what they considering to be their primary health provider at home, they need to have someone at college as well," says Elizabeth Gong-Guy, PhD, the director of counseling and psychological services at UCLA. "And



if a student with bipolar disorder is looking at a school in a rural community, they need to be proactive about what their local access to psychiatric care will be.”

Having a psychiatrist close at hand isn't important only for emergencies. In fact, bipolar students who have been stabilized on medication while at home may need to fine-tune their prescriptions while at school. “Students sometimes need adjustments to their medication in the new environment,” Dr. Kadison says. “It varies a lot, depending on the resiliency of the student, the supports that are already in place, and how much of an academic challenge the student is facing.”

Campus health services also provide counseling, which can help students cope with the emotional stress of living with bipolar disorder. Just as important, counseling can teach students everyday strategies for managing their symptoms.

In his forthcoming book, *Facing Bipolar: The Young Adult's Guide to Dealing With Bipolar Disorder*, Russell Federman outlines what he calls the “four S's of bipolar stability: structure, stress management, sleep management, and self-monitoring.” This framework entails setting—and sticking to—a regular schedule of studying and sleep, and learning to recognize the signs that you are beginning to drift into mania or hypomania.



Stacy, 25, who graduated from university in 2008, has what her doctor calls bipolar type III, a diagnosis that typically describes a form of hypomania associated with antidepressants. Dealing with depressive episodes in college, Hollingsworth never knew when she was going to crash, so she made sure to do her assignments well ahead of time. She also talked to her professors on the first day of class about her mental health and documented her case at disability services on campus. Students tend to associate such resources with physical disabilities, but these centers often help students with mental health disorders as well.

“I felt OK about sharing with professors, and they were great about working with me,” Hollingsworth says. “Be prepared to encounter people who don't understand, but try to get the school behind you.”

#### **Other sources of support on campus**

In addition to campus health services, peer counseling can be a valuable source of support. The Mood Disorders Association of Ontario offers peer support drop-in programs designed for youth and young adults. See our webpage for details on schedules and locations.

- Michele Hoos is a writer, editor, and multimedia producer living in New York City. Her work has appeared in CNN.com, The Times of Trenton, New York Press, The San Diego Union-Tribune, and The Daily Muse. She was the 2010 Digital Media Fellow at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. Currently, she works in communications at Columbia University Medical Center.

## Laughing Like Crazy Comedy Showcase

On August 1st, the 15th Laughing Like Crazy Group presented their graduation Comedy Showcase. It was a huge success! Over 300 people attended and laughed along with the twelve comics. In addition to an evening filled with great humour, the Laughing Like Crazy program also raised \$863.86 in donations.



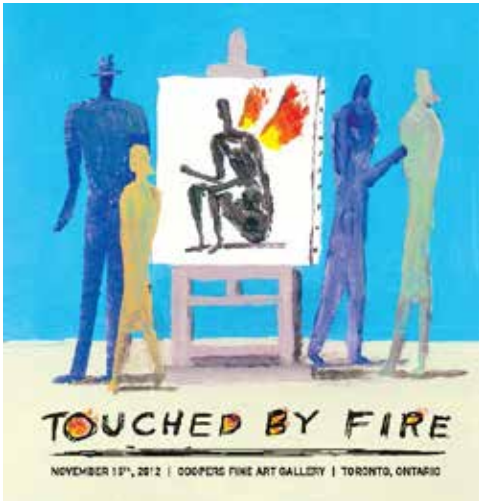
MDAO also wishes to thank Seema and Wendy for providing the baked goods for the show. Their efforts helped to raise an additional \$122! We all look forward to the AGM, where we'll be selling things again.

[www.moordisorders.ca/program/laughing-like-crazy](http://www.moordisorders.ca/program/laughing-like-crazy)

### Looking for Stories

Interested in adding content to our next newsletter? Send your suggestions to Lawrence at [lawrencep@moordisorders.ca](mailto:lawrencep@moordisorders.ca)

# From the Library



## Touched By Fire

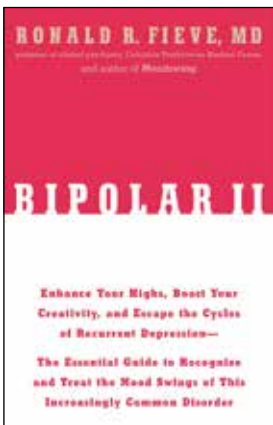
One of MDAO's most successful endeavors is our Touched By Fire art show, which celebrates the work of artists with mood disorders such as depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder. Every year an impressive array of artists present their work and submit it to be judged

by a professional panel of critics. The event is coming up on its seventh year and the show we're planning in November is looking to be our most exciting yet!

In order that the works featured in this wonderful event might reach a wider audience, for the past three years we have compiled a catalogue of the artwork, demonstrating the incredible talent of the artists involved. Included within each book are one to three pieces of art from over fifty artists, a description of the medium used, and in most cases a word from the artist about their work and their experience with mood disorders. Each catalogue showcases an eclectic display of talent and creativity, impressively wielded by artists who have overcome great difficulties to continue expressing themselves through their passions.

The Touched By Fire catalogues are available through our website and cost \$10.00 each, with a \$5.00 shipping and handling fee. Proceeds from this catalogue sale goes directly to the Touched By Fire program.

## A New Review



### **BIPOLAR II: Enhance Your Highs, Boost Your Creativity, and Escape the Cycles of Recurrent Depression – The Essential Guide to Recognize and Treat the Mood Swings of This Increasingly Common Disorder**

by Ronald R. Fieve, MD

This could be the longest title of a book that we've ever seen and the grandiosity of it all or the lack of conciseness seems practically hypomanic; after all, when you're in it don't

you want to do it all and say it all? Then again, Bipolar is a big topic. Those who have a diagnosis of bipolar disorder will recognize "the buzz – the electric, ultra-positive feeling of focus and productivity" called hypomania (mild mania), a key symptom of Bipolar II and a subtype of the bipolar spectrum. And who wouldn't want to feel fantastic all the time? Dr. Fieve wants to spread the word that Bipolar II can actually be beneficial if diagnosed, treated, and managed so that individuals can make the most of the highs, optimize creativity, and minimize, if not do away entirely with the devastating lows. He's written a book to help you and your family recognize the signs and symptoms of mild to severe depression and hypomania, and how to be proactive in preventing debilitating episodes. What we liked: a straight forward non-clinical tone, 'spectrum at a glance', a chapter devoted to mood swings and family genetics, and a few useful 'stay-well strategies,' and some mood tracking tools and self-assessments that may be beneficial to many. Downside? Dr. Fieve's resources are all US-based. However, the end notes may be appealing to anyone who is interested in digging deep into the topic, as there are plenty of threads to follow.

- By Gwen H.

Mood Disorders Association of Ontario





## Discounted Tickets to “Next to Normal” at the Lower Ossington Theatre!

Pulitzer- Prize and Tony Award winning musical NEXT TO NORMAL hits the Lower Ossington Theatre this August! The show tells the story of a mother’s struggle with worsening bipolar disorder and the effect the illness has on her family.

Next to Normal runs from August 29th – September 29th, 2013 and we are offering members of The Mood Disorders Association of Ontario community 30% off all ticket prices. Buy your tickets today: <http://goo.gl/Oyi7w5>

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## From the Board . . .

The new Chair of the Board of Directors of the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario is Sharon Cohen. Sharon has been a board member of MDAO since 2007 and is an active community volunteer.

Sharon brings a wealth of experience to her new role. In business she is President of Shared Solutions Management Consulting, specializing in providing advice and support to the public, broader public and non-profit sectors in the areas of shared services design and implementation, integrated service delivery, and agency modernization and transformations. Prior to starting her consulting practice, Sharon was a senior executive with the Ontario Public Service, where she had an extensive and varied career. She was the

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Ontario Shared Services, then one of the world’s largest public sector shared services organizations. She also led the Ontario Human Rights Commission, was General Manager of the Ontario Science Centre, and for many years served as chief administrative officer for a number of Ontario government ministries.

In her voluntary capacity, Sharon is also a past Chair of Jewish Immigrant Aid Services, Toronto, and a current board member.

Sharon holds an Honours Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from York University, and a Master of Arts in Political Economy from the University of Toronto.

# TOUCHED BY FIRE

**The Seventh Year! November 5th, 2013**

**See [touchedbyfire.co](http://touchedbyfire.co) for more information**

Touched By Fire is a non-profit program to celebrate, support, and inspire the work of artists with mood disorders such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar. An initiative of the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario, the project includes a non-juried, inclusive on-line gallery and juried annual exhibitions, "the art show you have to be crazy to enter."

Artists who experience depression, mania, and anxiety face unique personal, social, and professional challenges. Touched By Fire, free from stigma-based barriers, offers a supportive environment and opportunities for these artists. With understanding, humour, and solidarity, the program promotes the work of these artists and challenges them to personal and professional development. Artists keep 100% of their earnings for works sold through the online galleries and annual exhibitions.

Touched By Fire's inclusive virtual marketplace provides an open venue, thus encouraging active participation and engagement in the creative community. By recognizing the artistic contribution of artists with mood disorders, the Touched By Fire gallery provides sales and promotional opportunities that help instill confidence and help artists connect at their own pace. The juried event provides a celebration of the selected work, promoting pride in excellence and creative growth, and gives artists considerable exposure. The show also offers the community at large an opportunity to learn more about mood disorders, and the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario.

Art submissions will be accepted September 3rd to October 4th. See [touchedbyfire.co](http://touchedbyfire.co) for submission details and requirements.



# 2013 Lilly-MDAO Moving Lives Forward scholarships Awarded



The Mood Disorders Association is proud to partner with Eli Lilly Canada to provide the *Lilly-MDAO "Moving Lives Forward Award."* Six individuals, whose studies were interrupted by mood disorders, will be awarded \$2,000 scholarships to continue to pursue their academic goals on an annual basis thanks to this partnership.

This year's winners are:



Jamie T.



Kara C.



Amy B.



Ruston B.



Genevieve M.



Ashley W.

Congratulations to them all, and we wish them all success in the upcoming school year.

**Scholarship winners will be showcased at this year's Annual General Meeting, held on September 18th at the Central YMCA in downtown Toronto. Please join us in celebrating their achievement.**



The Mood Disorders Association of Ontario is pleased to announce that we have been awarded a three-year grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. These funds will allow us to increase our provincial outreach, bringing our programs and services to more areas throughout Ontario.



An agency of the Government of Ontario.  
Relève du gouvernement de l'Ontario.



Mood Disorders Association of Ontario

## Membership has its benefits...

A \$25 membership with the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario will ensure you receive:

- Borrowing privileges from our library;
- A continued subscription to our quarterly newsletter;
- Advanced notice of public education events in your community;
- An opportunity to participate in consultative focus groups; and
- Voting privileges at the annual general meeting.

This year, your membership fee is also tax deductible.

In addition to becoming a member, you may want to consider making an additional donation to the Mood Disorder Association. Your donation today will help us continue to provide the much-needed support to people, and their families, living with depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder. You will be contributing to our FREE support and recovery programs across

the province. Over the past year, we have able to:

- offer 54 peer support groups (9 in Toronto, 45 elsewhere), through 31 affiliate members across the province, supporting 19,000 registered participants and 79,000 individual visits
- provide 9 recovery programs in Toronto, offered 2 to 3 times per year, engaging over 1,500 people annually
- assist more than 408 family members and newly diagnosed young people, providing individual family counselling and bringing families together to create self-sustaining support models
- deliver web-based resources attracting over 130,000 unique visitors annually
- provide a toll-free telephone warm-line, handling over 3,410 calls in the past year
- collaborate with high schools on Stop the Stigma Week, presenting to over 11,000 students across the province

Visit <http://www.mooddorders.ca/membership> to join today.

## Free AGO Access

If you've paid for your annual membership, you are eligible to use one of the MDAO's Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) Membership cards. These cards can be signed out for 3 days, and allows you free entrance for two adults, and up to five children (under 18) to both the permanent collection and to special exhibits, and free coat check. If you are interested in arranging a group (up to 20 people) please call the MDAO at (416) 486-8046 ext 222 and we can make arrangements for a guided tour.

A special thanks to all those who helped put this edition together:

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