March 27, 2018

2018 MHA Clifford W. Beers Award – Robert S. Laitman, M.D.

Dear Ms. Wallace-

Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America (SARDAA) proudly nominates Robert S. Laitman, M.D., physician and mental health advocate, as a candidate for the 2018 MHA Clifford W. Beers Award. Dr. Laitman, a member of SARDAA’s Board of Directors, is certified in Internal Medicine, Nephrology and Geriatric Medicine, practicing at the Bronx Westchester Group in New York City.

Dr. Laitman exemplifies the Clifford W. Beers Award criteria as he focuses his efforts to change the way psychiatric care is delivered to those affected by severe, persistent mental illness and psychosis. It is his belief that the optimal use of appropriate prescribing of underutilized medications, including Clozapine, along with other therapies, can greatly enhance the outlook for this population.

Dr. Laitman’s son, Daniel, developed Schizophrenia in 2006. This not only changed his son’s life trajectory, but affected Dr. Laitman’s entire family. Daniel was subjected to 4 different antipsychotics, 3 concomitantly, until the family finally prevailed and Daniel 18 months into full blown psychosis, began clozapine and his recovery. Though they were initially thrilled with Daniel's improvement after commencing clozapine, it soon became apparent that clozapine by itself was not going to be the entire answer. This realization drove the Laitman’s to seek an integrated global approach to optimize care. They combined multiple other medications, cognitive behavioral therapy, cognitive remediation, social and educational support, and active exercise, becoming avid runners. Daniel continues to improve and exceed expectations. Daniel now lives independently in the East Village and is actively pursuing a career as a Stand Up comic (Daniel Laitman.com).

There is more work to do with Daniel’s recovery, but the Laitman’s look forward to the future with great optimism. In 2011, Dr. Laitman and Family started their life of charity and advocacy. In honor of Daniel, they created Team Daniel Running For Recovery From Mental Illness (<https://www.teamdanielrunningforrecovery.org>) to raise awareness and money, over $250,000, in support of mental health research and other groups that support people with mental illness.

The Laitman’s have become more involved with the Brain and Behavior Research Foundation (BBRF), NAMI, and MHA. Dr. Laitman presently serves on the Board of Directors of both NAMI NYS and Westchester and SARDAA. Dr. Laitman’s wife, Amy, is a member of the woman’s committee of BBRF and serves on the Board of MHA Westchester. Because of these efforts and affiliations, the Laitman’s have been given a voice, speaking at a variety of conferences and mental health institutions to share their story to advocate for mental health. Dr. Laitman has been a speaker at a variety of NAMIs 2014-2016, MHA’s 2014 Ira Stevens Conference, Pilgrim State’s Wellness day 2014-15, and Grand Rounds at Stony Brook Psychiatry 2014.

In 2016, Dr. Laitman and Daniel participated in the production of SARDAA’s award winning perception changing program, Hearing Voices of Support (HVoS). Daniel’s story about living with psychosis is included in the production. Hearing Voices of Support features video interviews of brave diagnosed individuals and family members sharing their stories of living with psychosis and how people can be supportive. HVoS is a major initiative to help ensure people who are affected by psychosis are heard and, in return, hear voices of support from the wider community.

After entering a darkened gallery filled with stage smoke, guests step into a pillar of light surrounding the guest with the voice of the projected video creating an intimate experience between the speaker and the viewer. The atmosphere creates a sense of what a person with psychosis might experience. Guests record their experience; messages of support scroll on an 80" screen for all to see. Each day, messages converge to spell one word (e.g. "HOPE", "LOVE", "COURAGE"). Afterward, people affected by psychosis and professionals are available for discussion and guests are asked to complete an exit survey of their experience. A multi-pronged initiative, HVoS includes: Website of professionally produced videos of people speaking of their experiences with psychosis and how people can be supportive where visitors can leave messages of support and share; Facebook page to share stories, upload videos, like and share; Multimedia campaign including the inaugural jumbo Tron in Times Square displaying a positive message of schizophrenia; Times Square Flash Mob singing “Brave”; and, Perception changing experiential art installation complete with artwork, exit interviews and surveys.

Dr. Laitman also participated in an American Airlines Ad to raise awareness of psychosis and effective underutilized treatments, such as Clozapine. Because of Dr. Laitman and his family’s efforts, millions of people have been impacted globally as visitors from all over the world have viewed Daniel’s story on the HVoS website, seen the American Airlines Ad and joined Team Daniel Running for Recovery from Mental Illness to advocate for mental health awareness, increased research and funding, and improved treatment outcomes.

For more information about Hearing Voices of Support and to view Daniels’s story, visit [www.hearingvoicesofsupport.org](http://www.hearingvoicesofsupport.org) and <https://youtu.be/Bi5YUtGpJPE>. Also, attached is an article about The Bloc’s Humanitarian Award for SARDAA’s Hearing Voices of Support initiative.

Thank you for the opportunity to share Dr. Laitman and his family’s brave story, notable work and commitment to changing perceptions of mental illness and advocating to change the treatment paradigm for severe mental illness. If more information is required or if you have any questions, I can be reached at [flora.davis@sardaa.org](mailto:flora.davis@sardaa.org) or 817.925.4421.

Regards,

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Director of External Affairs

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