

# LUTHERAN NETWORK ON MENTAL ILLNESS/ BRAIN DISORDERS



SERVING ALL LUTHERAN FAMILIES  
ELCA AND LCMS

Spring 2009



## PRISON RELEASE AND MENTAL ILLNESS

A disturbing story of what happens to offenders who have mental illness when they leave prison is shown in The Released, a film aired on April 28 by FRONTLINE filmmakers.

This year alone over 700,000 people will leave prison, more than half of them mentally ill. These offenders leave prison with a bus ticket, \$75 in cash, and two weeks' worth of medication. Studies show that within 18 months, nearly two-thirds of mentally ill offenders - often poor and cut off from family - are rearrested.

FRONTLINE follows Lynn Moore, a paranoid schizophrenic with a history of drug and alcohol abuse, who was arrested more than 20 times and sent to prison for the fourth time.

For about a month, Moore stays on his medication and does well. But when he fails a breathalyzer test, he is asked to leave the shelter, and, like the majority of unsupervised ex-offenders, is unable to remain on medication.

Unmedicated, his hallucinations reappear. Moore is charged with criminal damage, goes to the county jail. He is released, to be once again arrested. To view the story online, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/released/>

## WHAT IS AGORAPHOBIA?

( Literally, in Greek, "fear of the marketplace " )

( Sometimes we are asked to write about specific mental illnesses/disorders experienced by family members. )

Mayo Clinic says: "Agoraphobia is a type of anxiety disorder related to fear. With agoraphobia, you fear being in places where it may be difficult or embarrassing to get out quickly or where you may have a panic attack and can't get help. Because of your fears, you avoid places where you think you may have a panic attack or panic-like symptoms.

People with agoraphobia often have a hard time feeling safe in any public place, especially where crowds gather. Commonly feared places and situations are elevators, sporting events, lines, bridges, public transportation, driving, shopping malls and airplanes.

The fears can be so overwhelming that some people are essentially trapped in their own homes — it's the only place they feel truly safe, so they don't venture out into public at all.

Many experts consider agoraphobia to be a complication of panic disorder. Panic disorder is a type of anxiety disorder characterized by frequent episodes of intense fear (panic attacks) that for no apparent reason trigger severe physical reactions. Panic attacks can be very frightening. When panic attacks occur, you might think you're losing control, having a heart attack or even dying.

As with many other mental disorders, agoraphobia treatment typically includes a combination of medication and psychotherapy. Treatment of agoraphobia is often successful, and you can overcome agoraphobia and learn to keep it under control.

**Medications:** Antidepressant and anti-anxiety medications are commonly used to treat agoraphobia and panic symptoms. You may have to try several different medications before you find one that works best for you."

**God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble...Psalm 46:1**

## BUILDING A CARE KIT

Families involved in caring for a loved one know the importance of having an accurate record of previous care and medications. A CARE kit (Critical Advocacy Resources for Emergency) can be shared with treatment professionals and others. The materials may be assembled in a 3-ring binder or other easily carried system. Keep at least 5 copies of this document in your CARE kit so it may be shared with more than one person. Keep it current and regularly updated.

The CARE kit should contain:

- Full name
- Current age
- Psychiatric diagnosis
- Age at diagnosis
- City of residence
- Current symptoms and concerns ( suicidal, homeless, violent, substance abuse, vulnerable )
- Psychiatrist 's name and phone
- Local service provider name/number
- Dates of hospitalizations/locations
- Dates of arrests and charges
- Current medications
- Past medications that have helped
- Past medications not effective
- Past history of behaviors ( debts, car accidents, threatening family members )
- Full name, phone numbers/ address for emergency contact person.



Keep a recent picture of your loved one, a list of vital statistics, height, weight, hair color.

Print a copy of your state 's criteria for emergency evaluations and for civil commitments. If possible, have your loved one sign a release that allows you access to his or her medical information. Keep a copy of this document in your CARE kit.

( Information from Catalyst,  
Treatment Advocacy Center )

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### FAMILY-TO-FAMILY

#### EDUCATION PROGRAM

Free 12-week course for families and friends of individuals with mental illness.



The course is taught by trained family members who have lived with this experience. Call 1-800-950 NAMI ( 6264 ) for classes available in your area.

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For information about mental illnesses and disorders, medications, research, book reviews, go to: NAMI.org

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**Editor's note: any concerns, suggestions, or mailing changes may be e-mailed to:**

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(Please use "LNMI" in subject line or it may not get through.)

**For LNMI/BD brochure on Mental Illness, call: Pastor Lisa Cleaver, Director Disability Ministries: 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2692**