A Century of Pioneering Mental Health Care, Treatment, and Research

**SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN 1919,** Riggs has been a place where patients work with staff to find meaning and reclaim lives worth living. While much has changed, the centrality and importance of human relationships, the respect for every patient’s voice, and the importance of attending to the meaning behind specific symptoms and behavior have remained constant. In 2019 we are reflecting on the past, looking toward the future, and celebrating this remarkable milestone. We hope you will join us for some or all of the exciting events outlined below.

**“The Hospital on Main Street: Human Dignity and Mental Health”** An exhibition chronicling the founding of Riggs and its place in the history of mental health treatment.

**LOCATION:** The Corner House, 48 Main Street, Stockbridge, MA.

**DATES:** Opens May 25, runs through the fall.

**“Inspired: Norman Rockwell And Erik Erikson”** A collaborative exhibition exploring the dynamic relationship between Stockbridge artist Rockwell and notable Riggs staff psychoanalyst Erikson.

**LOCATION:** Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, MA.

**DATES:** Opens June 8, runs through October 27.

**“The Mental Health Crisis in America: Recognizing Problems, Working Toward Solutions”** For its centennial conference, Riggs will convene a panel of national and international experts in the fields of mental health treatment, research, advocacy, and the law.

**LOCATION:** Tanglewood’s Linde Center for Music and Learning, Lenox, MA.

**DATES:** September 21–22, 2019.

**100th Anniversary Gala Celebration**

A festive evening event on Saturday, September 21.

Details to follow.

Visit: www.austenriggs.org/100 for news, events, and more.
This is the Centennial Year of the Austen Riggs Center—a truly remarkable milestone. For the past 100 years, Riggs has stood for an integrated biopsychosocial approach to treating people with mental illness to help them reclaim their lives. At every step, the centrality and importance of human relationships, respect for the voices of patients, and the meaning of their symptoms and struggles have remained and still remain at the core of our treatment.

In this issue of the ARC News, you’ll read about exciting events we have planned to mark our centennial, including: an exhibition of Riggs history and its place in the history of mental health treatment, a collaboration with the Norman Rockwell Museum that explores the creative partnership between Erikson and Rockwell, and an ambitious Fall Conference that examines the problems of and potential solutions to the mental health crisis in America.

You will also read an introduction to what we are conceiving as the “Four Freedoms of Mental Health,” modeled after Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms and Rockwell’s iconic illustrations, and a piece about the first of these freedoms: freedom from stigma.

Please join us at some or all of these celebrations; but most important, we would love to hear from you—tell us your stories, share your Riggs memories (recent or long ago), and let us know what the centennial means to you and what your hopes are for Riggs in the next hundred years. Write, call, email, or visit us online at www.austenriggs.org/share-your-story.

Finally, thank you for being a part of the Riggs community—your support is crucial to our success and we are grateful.

Sincerely,

Eric M. Plakun, MD
Medical Director/CEO

Four Freedoms of Mental Health Award

THE FOUR FREEDOMS THAT FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT spoke about in January of 1941, and that Norman Rockwell immortalized in his 1943 illustrations—freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear—are as relevant today as ever.

In the spirit of the originals, the Austen Riggs Center is proposing the Four Freedoms of Mental Health:

- **Freedom from stigma**
- **Freedom from dehumanizing treatment**
- **Freedom to pursue recovery**
- **Freedom of access to medically necessary treatment**

These freedoms tie directly to the underlying principles and philosophy of treatment that Riggs has pioneered over the past 100 years, grounded in the importance of relationships, the meaning behind symptoms, and the voices of patients in their lives and in their treatments.

There are a number of individuals and organizations already working hard to help those struggling with mental illness, and they deserve to be commended for their work. To that end, and in honor of its Centennial Year in 2019, the Austen Riggs Center has established the Four Freedoms of Mental Health Award to periodically recognize an individual’s or group’s work to advance the cause of accessible, quality mental health care in the United States and to help those with mental illness realize the Four Freedoms of Mental Health.

The inaugural award will be presented at the Centennial Fall Conference, September 21–22 at Tanglewood’s new Linde Center for Music and Learning.

There will be four issues of the ARC News in 2019, and each will contain a feature article on one of the Four Freedoms of Mental Health.
**Freedom from Stigma**

**FREEDOM FROM STIGMA IS THE FIRST OF THE FOUR FREEDOMS** that are foundations of mental health.

In the United States, estimates are that nearly 45 million adults have mental illness; yet fewer than half reportedly seek treatment (National Institute of Mental Health, 2018). Most people have either struggled with symptoms of a mental illness at some point in their lives or know someone who has. Despite this shared experience, stigma toward mental illness persists.

Perceived stigma is often cited as one of the barriers to seeking treatment (Mann & Himelein, 2008). While some studies show progress in reducing stigma through mass media interventions (Clement, et al., 2013), individuals with mental illness continue to face prejudice and stigma, which in some instances is more debilitating than mental illness itself (Thornicroft, Rose, Kassam, & Sartorius, 2007).

Among the many factors contributing to the stigma toward mental illness, portrayals in the media are particularly challenging. In both entertainment and the news media, individuals with mental illness are often inaccurately and disproportionately depicted as dangerous and unpredictable. This has negative repercussions both for those struggling with mental illness and for the public’s understanding of mental illness. The fact is that individuals with a mental illness are far more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators of violence (Stuart, 2006).

**Entertainment media**
The entertainment industry has produced nuanced and accurate depictions of mental illness; but exaggerated and inaccurate depictions are far more common. Moreover, troubling stereotyped representations of mental illness persist in some children’s programming and movies (Stuart, 2006). Early exposure to negative stereotypes about mental illness can certainly play a role in solidifying false perceptions and prejudicial feelings or actions toward those with a mental illness during an important developmental period. A literature review by Muller, Callanan, and Greenwood (2015) of social communications to children about mental illness confirms the negative stereotypes children in middle childhood (7–11 years of age) are exposed to in the media. This coupled with an observed general silence and stigma around mental illness that they encounter from educators, peers, and their parents can have a lasting impact.

**News media**
The news media produces some sensitive and accurate reporting on mental illness, but at times is guilty of stigma-reinforcing, negative, and inaccurate information, particularly as it relates to the association of mental illness with violence or crime (Stuart, 2006). While there appear to be more open conversations about mental illness—celebrities are speaking out and there is a broader acknowledgment of the widespread incidence of mental illness—the depiction of mental illness in the news has changed little over time (Stuart, 2006).

This is problematic for a number of reasons, not the least of which is news media’s identification as a frequent source of health information for the general public (Peek, et al., 2015). The depiction of individuals with mental illness in a negative light leads to conscious and unconscious bias, prejudice, and discrimination. Mental health professionals and mental health treatment are often depicted in a negative light in the media as well, which can lead to “widespread distrust of mental health providers and avoidance of psychiatric treatments” (Stuart, 2006, p. 103) by those who would likely benefit.

While a number of interventions, including psychoeducation and mass media campaigns, can increase public knowledge about mental illnesses and decrease prejudice, the overall rate of “mental health literacy” is relatively low, tends to be focused on symptomatology rather than broader individual contexts and histories, and has had little impact on larger issues of discrimination against those with mental illness.

**Addressing issues**
To help address some of the issues around stigma, Riggs is engaged in a number of activities including:

- **Recognizing** patients as capable individuals who come to us with both problems and strengths and deserve dignity, respect, and a voice in their treatment and in their lives.
- **Conducting** research that aims to better understand the struggles faced by those with mental illness, in order to better help them lead self-directed lives.

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2019 Riggs Prize for Excellence in Mental Health Media ($3,000 Award)

This prize, for which Riggs is currently accepting submissions, recognizes a select group of journalists, writers, and other media professionals, who create exemplary work that contributes to a deeper understanding of and greater public awareness about mental health issues.

The prize carries an award of $3,000 and will be presented at an event where the honoree (or honorees) will be invited to speak about their work. Attendance is welcome, but not required.

To learn more, review eligibility requirements, or apply, please visit: www.austenriggs.org/mediaprize. The deadline for submissions is May 15, 2019.

Share Your Riggs Stories

There are innumerable stories from and about Riggs over the past 100 years. We’ve created an online space where you can share your stories of Riggs:

www.austenriggs.org/share-your-story

Submit a sentence, a paragraph, or a page, we’ll review it, and then post some of the stories online (anonymously, if you prefer).

REFERENCES

Freedom from Stigma continued from page 3

Establishing a Four Freedoms of Mental Health Award, which you can read about in this issue of the ARC News.
Honoring excellent reporting on mental health with a Prize for Excellence in Mental Health Media.
Supporting an engaged Alumni Community of former patients, staff, and Board members through regular meetings and an active online community.

Progress is being made, but there is much work to be done. Those of us who work in the field, struggle with mental illness ourselves, or know someone who does can take the lead in providing accurate information about mental illness. In addition, we can point out and correct inaccurate information or depictions of mental illness when we see, hear, or read them, while at the same time recognizing and commending those individuals and organizations that get it right. This shared responsibility can make a difference.