

LYNDA WILLIAMS

SEPTEMBER 9, 2008

11:15 – 12:30 CONCURRENT SESSIONS II

My name is Lynda Williams, and I've been a patient of Austin People's Community Clinic since 2000. I not only receive my general primary care there; I also received my natal care there when I was pregnant with my son, and about a year ago I began to receive mental health services from them.

I'm a single mom, and my beautiful son is now seven years old. I've worked as receptionist/secretary, and all-around office manager in a law office here in Austin. About seven years ago, I brought my mother up from Alice, Texas, to live with me so that I could take care of her. She's now 81-years old and in the early stages of Alzheimer's. About two years ago, I brought my father up to live with us as well. He sometimes experiences dementia. So for several years now, I've been the primary daily caregiver for both my mother and father. I have brothers and sisters, but for one reason or another it seems like almost all of the burden for my parents has fallen on me.

About a year ago, I started to feel like I was hitting rock bottom. I was constantly crying; I was always sad; I was very anxious. I couldn't concentrate or focus. I wondered about going to therapy. But I didn't know how to begin. In my state of mind, I already felt confused and overwhelmed; on top of everything else, I hardly knew how to sort out even beginning how to find therapy for myself.

I was fortunate, though, in one way. For years I had been going to the Austin People's Community Clinic for my annual physical and routine female check-ups. Around the time I was feeling most confused, sad, and anxious; I went for my annual physical check-up. I went one evening after work, around 7:30 pm. And I broke down in the doctor's office. I started crying and I couldn't stop. Dr. Doggett came in and we just talked for awhile. I told her everything that was going on, especially with my parents.

Dr. Doggett that very evening had me fill out a Primary Care Mood Disorders Questionnaire. I answered honestly from my distressed state. Dr. Doggett was concerned; she thought perhaps that I had symptoms of bipolar disorder. Although thankfully that

later turned out not to be the case, I'm very grateful to have had some of my issues confronted immediately. Dr. Doggett asked that night if I was ready to confront my problems. I said yes, and she arranged for a social worker to call me the very next day. The social worker and I set up an appointment for 7:30 pm the evening we talked—just one day after I had gone to Dr. Doggett for what was supposed to have been a routine physical exam.

The therapist didn't diagnose me with bipolar disorder; she noted right away that I was overwhelmed by stress, by everything that I had on my plate, that I was stretching in every direction.

I've been in therapy ever since, and it's made a huge difference for me. And I don't know that I would have even begun therapy had Dr. Doggett not got things started at the People's Clinic that first evening I went for my physical exam. I don't know if I would have begun therapy if I had been referred elsewhere, at a later time. When you're distressed, when you feel confused and overwhelmed, it's very hard to consider even things like therapy "down the road", somewhere you're not familiar with. Getting immediate consideration from the very place I was receiving my primary care was absolutely key to my beginning and continuing therapy for my mental health.

I have a beloved friend who hasn't been so fortunate in receiving care for his mental health issues. For years he has struggled with anxiety, frustration and depression. He was recently incarcerated and released from jail with a diagnosis of BIPOLAR DISORDER. In jail, he had been receiving medication. When he was released, he was not given his medication but instead a referral to another mental health system. No one contacted him about pursuing services; it was all up to his initiative. And when you're very confused, even what might otherwise seem like a small task, like setting up an appointment, can be overwhelming. My friend was dealing not only with his own disorder but the stress of being released from jail without a secure place to work or live. He contacted the agency but grew frustrated and confused about not being able to talk to a professional right away. He would wait for hours at the agency and not get reached because they simply had too many other people they were dealing with before him. Left on his own, he struggled with his issues and was eventually hospitalized for a brief time. He is doing much better, but he continues to face challenges, and I cannot help but

believe many of his problems these last few months could have been avoided if he had been able to obtain immediate, accessible help >>>>> as I DID!