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2014 NATIONAL PHILOPTOCHOS BIENNIAL CONVENTION  
PHILADELPHIA MARRIOTT DOWNTOWN

SOCIAL SERVICES PANEL DISCUSSION  
MONDAY, JULY 7, 2014

MENTAL ILLNESS:  
OUR COMMUNITY'S JOURNEY TO UNDERSTANDING, COMPASSION & HOPE

**MODERATOR:** *Paulette Geanacopoulos, LMSW, Director of the National Philoptochos Department of Social Work opened the presentation with a framework for the program - why this topic and why now; stigma of mental illness in our community. She introduced the panelists, and fielded questions at the end.*

**PANELIST # 1: UNDERSTANDING MENTAL ILLNESS:**



*Panelist: Demetria DeLia, Ph.D., LCSW, M.A.*

The panelist is a clinician who provided an overview of mental illness including its prevalence in the United States and our community, with a focus on major depression, paranoid schizophrenia, bipolar and borderline personality disorders; violence (e.g. school shootings, suicide/suicidal ideation among young adults); fertility issues/post-partum depression; and the interrelationship between mental illness and substance abuse - drugs to self-medicate; drugs bringing on psychotic episodes. She discussed some of the legal and ethical issues regarding mental health services in relation to treatment options, and closed with a statement that mental illness is not solely experienced by the patient, but also by his / her family.

Panelist Bio:

*Dr. Demetria DeLia is a Certified Psychoanalyst and Licensed Clinical Social Worker who is in Private Practice in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, is a Supervisor at Family Services of Morristown, N.J., and a member of the Academy of Clinical and Applied Psychoanalysis. She has published several articles and has lectured extensively on family mental health issues. Dr. DeLia was the Dean of Curriculum at the NJ Center for Modern Psychoanalysis, and served on the faculty and as supervising analyst at the Centenary College, MA, Psychoanalytic Counseling Program. She holds a Ph.D. from New York University, has taken Post-Doctoral Courses in Trauma at Harvard University Medical School, and holds an M.S.W. from Rutgers University.*

**PANELIST # 2: IMPACT OF MENTAL ILLNESS ON THE FAMILY:**

*Panelist: Christina Kallas, Esq.*



The second panelist discussed the impact of mental illness on family members, including feelings of overwhelming responsibility, frustration, anger, hurt, stress, chaotic family life, exhaustion, loyalty and loneliness. Ms. Kallas discussed how some family members become enablers, others blame themselves or their spouse for the mental illness and yet others focus only on the diagnosed relative while ignoring other family members. Using personal experiences, she discussed the importance and role of family support groups - as a safe place to reveal and speak about their feelings, as a means to obtaining accurate information and education about their relative's condition,

as a place to talk to and learn from others experiencing similar issues, and as a guide to assessing and obtaining appropriate resources. This panelist closed with a statement that family members can find hope when they focus on the person rather than the illness.

Panelist Bio:

*Christina Kallas, Esq. has a private practice as a mediator and lawyer. She is a former President of the New York Women's Bar Association, a current member of its Advisory Council, and serves on the Board of its Foundation. Since 1994, Ms. Kallas has focused her law practice on Alternative Dispute Resolution. She is a mediator for the Community Dispute Resolution Center of Safe Horizons (now the Peace Institute) mediating disputes involving matters of the community, juveniles, child custody, visitation and mental illness. Motivated by their personal experience, for the past decade and following intensive training for non-mental health professionals, Ms. Kallas and her husband, Xenophon Theophall, have been facilitators for the Family Connections Program of the National Educational Alliance for Borderline Personality Disorder (NEA BPD), a 12-week program for relatives of people suffering from BPD to help caregivers take better care of themselves and reduce overall family stress. In 2013, she and her husband were recruited by the Archdiocese to be facilitators of "The Journey of Marriage", a workshop designed for couples planning to marry in the Orthodox Church. She is a frequent lecturer and motivational speaker at venues as varied as public middle schools, the Congress of Racial Equality, and her parish, Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in New York City.*

**PANELIST # 3: SUPPORTING THE JOURNEY THROUGH FAITH & HOPE:**

***Panelist: Rev. Protopresbyter Nicholas G. Anctil***



Rev. Protopresbyter Nicholas G. Anctil pointed out that the Church environment can be a source of hope when we approach those affected with understanding, love and compassion. He referenced Orthodox teachings and cultural interpretations to inform his presentation including our belief that humans are in a "state of brokenness", dispelling the myth that mental illness has roots in demonic possession. He promoted the Church as a natural support network and recommended that clergymen, Philoptochos members and parishioners partner with therapists and support groups to ensure that their services are conducted with sensitivity to the characteristics unique to our community, including our perspectives of religion, faith and

spirituality. In response to some of the specific issues raised by the previous two panelists, he recommended that outreach and educational programs be co-sponsored jointly by Philoptochos, GOYA and other church organizations to help parishioners properly understand, identify and respond appropriately to such concerns. He ended his presentation by reading a section of select prayers for spiritual healing.

Panelist Bio:

*Rev. Protopresbyter Nicholas G. Anctil is the Proistamenos at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in New Rochelle, N.Y. He serves as President of the Archdiocesan Presbyters Council and is one of the Chairs of the APC/NSP Benevolence Committee. Born in Nashua, NH, Rev. Anctil is a 1980 graduate of Hellenic College and a 1984 graduate of Holy Cross School of Theology. Ordained to the priesthood in 1984 by His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios, he served at St. Demetrios Cathedral in Astoria, NY from 1984 to 1989 and Holy Trinity - St. Nicholas Church in Staten Island, NY from 1989 to 1996 prior to his assignment in 1996 to New Rochelle.*