

# Community & Lifestyles

## Living With Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

by Judy Thomas

Imagine you are in class, and you just can't get your notes to look right.

You keep writing and writing, trying to get them to look perfect, and it is driving you crazy. Your professor keeps talking at a brisk pace, and you can't keep up.

Anxiously ripping imperfect pages out of your notebook, you keep glancing behind you to make sure other students aren't watching what you are doing. You feel you are being ridiculous, but you can't stop. You leave class discouraged with a backpack full of balled up paper, and an empty notebook.

For one student\* with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), this was an everyday occurrence. "OCD was like a prison I lived in," she said. With her obsessions and compulsions raging out of control, her grades plummeted, and she left college in 1989, her freshman year, defeated.

For the next 13 years, her life was dominated by her OCD in many different forms. "There wasn't a time when my brain wasn't obsessing about something," she said. Housebound and desperate, she tried everything including medication, hospitalization, and electric shock therapy. After seeing four psychiatrists and five psychologists, Dr. Jonathan Grayson finally helped her find a way out with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).

Through CBT, or Exposure Response Prevention (ERP), she was exposed to her anxiety-provoking obsessive thoughts, and instructed not to perform the compulsions that previously provided her with relief. "His treatment is simple," she said, "whatever you're afraid of, you do it."

Through this type of therapy, she explained that patients learn to "live with the uncertainty of things," with hands that are possibly unclean, and imperfectly written notes. After 10 months with Grayson, she regained control of her life, and is back in school at the age of 30. "He's a life saver," she said.

Although cognitive behavior treatment has been available for the last 20 years, and research has proven it a most effective treatment for OCD, Grayson said some obsessive-compulsives are still suffering unnecessarily for a variety of reasons.

Director of The Anxiety and Agoraphobia Treatment Center in Bala Cynwyd, Pa., and leader of the oldest OCD group

in the country, Grayson said misdiagnosis, inadequate care, and financial difficulties imposed by insurance companies unwilling to cover treatment, are some of the obstacles obsessive-compulsives may encounter on their road to recovery.

While stereotypical manifestations of the disorder, like compulsive hand washing, are easily diagnosed, he explained that obscure OCD symptoms can be difficult to identify, and even elude therapists. Some therapists who properly diagnose the disorder will erroneously prescribe medication without providing additional therapy, he explained, based on a belief that OCD has "a biological" basis.

Dr. Edna Foa, author of "Stop Obsessing! Overcoming your Obsessions and Compulsions," Director of the Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety, and internationally known for her work with anxiety disorders, agrees "the effect (of medication) is not amazingly wonderful." While she acknowledges that selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) such

as Luvox, Paxil, Anafranil, Prozac, and Zoloft, are more effective than a placebo, she stresses patients' active participation through ERP is key in managing obsessive-compulsive symptoms.

Many other therapists, Grayson surmises, "basically don't keep up with" or "believe the literature" and practice the type of therapy they are trained in, which he explains can be equally damaging to the patient.

Another of Grayson's patients\* attests to this, explaining that her symptoms worsened while she was treated with Luvox medication and traditional talk therapy, which were the only options available to her through her health insurance plan with Keystone HealthPlan East.

After suffering with contamination fears for years, she finally sought treatment when her symptoms escalated. Prevented from cooking in her own kitchen, which was never clean enough for use despite her elaborate cleansing rituals, from driving, for fear of touching an unclean

steering wheel and from opening her own mail, she was completely disabled. Unable to even use her telephone, her husband placed the call to have her admitted to Bustleton Guidance Center, Northeast Philadelphia, where she was treated unsuccessfully for five months.

Her symptoms progressed throughout her stay, and she pleaded with doctors for help. Passed from therapist to therapist, and repeatedly promised an OCD expert that was never delivered, she started exploring other options and found Grayson's clinic.

She was disappointed to learn his services would not be covered under her current insurance plan because he was not a network doctor. Following an ongoing dispute with Keystone regarding her coverage, she was finally reimbursed minimally for her treatment, but paid primarily out of pocket for her cognitive behav-

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## Theatre To Reopen On College Avenue

by Kelly Kilmer

State College is finally going to get a little more downtown culture. The State Theatre on West College Avenue closed a little over a year ago, in April of 2001, when Carmike Cinemas reorganized and closed down theatres across the country when it was operating under the provisions of chapter 11 of title 11 of the U.S. Code (the "Bankruptcy Code").

Mike Negra, owner of Mike's Video, had visions of the State Theatre becoming a community theatre as early as 2000, when he saw the band Little Feat perform at a small theatre in York, PA. Negra mused, "The State was the only theatre that seemed to be appropriate."

As impetus for the proposal, Negra says that, "all we have for performing arts that is not university owned is the Boal Barn, and there is no winter home for theatre. In January 2002, the owner of the State Theatre, Sidney Friedman, made a commitment to donate the theatre. Once he made that commitment I made a reverse commitment to spearhead the organization that would renovate and oper-

ate the theatre."

Negra goes on to explain that the non-profit organization, which received its 501(c)(3) non-profit status in mid-May, has a main goal of providing a venue for the community arts. It will create a per-



Photo by Marianne Ways

The State Theatre on College Avenue has been closed since April of 2001.

formance space for non-professional local theatre groups, such as the State College Community Theatre, as well as dance troupes, and local or national concerts. It

is envisioned as a music venue for the community that will be an alternative to bars, and potentially could show independent and foreign films, reissues, premieres for second runs, film festivals and more.

Nancy Turow, a State College resident formerly of Andover, MA is thrilled with the idea of a community theatre. "My opinion is that it's fabulous. Anything that brings families downtown is terrific and I applaud these people for taking this on. I also think it's a nice venue for people who aren't university affiliated to have a place to perform and to be applauded. This community prides itself on its diversity and cultural opportunities, and this is a wonderful addition.

For those locals who remember the popular cult film, *Rocky Horror Motion Picture Show* at the State Theatre, there is no commitment yet to bring

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ioral therapy. "It really turned me around," she said.

After spending eight weeks at the treatment center, where she was "flooded with exposures" through ERP, she washed her hands of her major obsessive-compulsive symptoms.

Grayson explains that while coverage varies according to insurance carrier and plan, his patient's struggle is "fairly common" and each new patient has to "go through a battle" and "may or may not be successful getting out of network treatment."

Tom Corboy, Director of the OCD Center of Los Angeles, said he has seen the same problem out on the West coast, despite the passing of California Assembly Bill 88 in July of 2000. The bill, or parity law, mandates severe mental illness be treated "under the same terms and conditions applied to other medical conditions..."

While he admits the majority of his patients "have no problem being reimbursed," he explains the legislation contains a "loophole that allows managed care organizations to insist that clients seek treatment providers who are on their panel." Corboy, a behavioral therapist, explains this restriction is significant, as the number of cognitive behavioral therapists in the country is limited, and fewer still that serve on HMO panels.

Corboy predicts insurance carriers, concerned with maximizing profit, will continue to find excuses not to cover payment.

So what will the future hold for the 2.5% of the population afflicted with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder?

President Bush shares Corboy's concerns, and spoke publicly in April of 2000 about the discrepancy in the treatment of the physically and the mentally ill. He said he would like to see changes made to the current system, and intends to accomplish that end through legislation that has not yet been defined.

At the research level, Foa said cognitive behavioral therapy is working for patients. However, she said strides could be made to encourage patients that are still too intimidated to confront their worst fears through therapy.

Finally, Grayson's patient, a graduate of the cognitive behavioral school, concedes from experience that confronting one's fears is key to an individual's recovery. But, she maintains, on a larger scale, if change is to come about for obsessive-compulsives, more patients need to approach their insurance carrier with demands for adequate treatment. "It seems like everybody's afraid to do anything about it," she said.

For more information on OCD, visit [www.ocdla.com](http://www.ocdla.com) and [www.uphs.upenn.edu/cta/](http://www.uphs.upenn.edu/cta/).

\*Patient's names were kept confidential at their request.

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back the annual Halloween showing of the film, but Negra seemed amenable to considering the idea.

Brian Wray, a former PSU film student who now works in independent in New York City, muses, "State College has this great atmosphere for independent thinking and I could never figure out why there was never at least one theatre for independent film. When the four theatres in the area were all Carmike theatres, they all showed the same things instead of diversifying at all. It's encouraging that there will be the opportunity to expose people to more diversity."

"I just got done doing a movie with Mira Nair, *Monsoon Wedding* which is a tremendous film about an Indian wedding. I know State College has a fairly large community of southeast Asians, but there is no way that the mainstream theatres would show this film, and there's an audience in State College that isn't being tapped. From a selfish point of view, some movies that really deserve to be seen outside NYC and major cities have a better shot now that something like this is going on."

The newly created organization already has a board of directors, headed up by Negra as the President, and currently includes 12 members of the community, and is continuing to grow. According to Negra, "the schematic phase of the architectural plans will begin on Wednesday, May 22," and the board expects to begin fundraising in late August.

When asked if there were any concerns about competition with the Penn State School of Theatre's newly planned renovation of the former Danks building into a theatre, Negra assuredly stated, "absolutely not. They are two different types of theatres, and two different groups are using it. The Penn State theatre is much more student oriented and not community based. Do we see the University and students utilizing our theatre? Absolutely!"

The opening of the Danks building on the corner of South Allen and West Beaver is slated to take place by fall of 2003. As part of Penn State's School of Theatre, the space is primarily intended to serve as an additional performance center for students, however it may also be available for community performances.

For anyone interested in becoming involved with the new community theatre, their website (<http://www.thestatetheatre.org>) should be updated by June to include a volunteer signup sheet and people will have the ability to donate money online, through a secure site. The board of directors has not yet selected a volunteer coordinator but that person will eventually coordinate efforts to organize volunteer work.

According to Negra, the State College Borough and downtown businesses have reacted very positively. "The borough has been very helpful." Jokingly, he adds, "We haven't been asking for much, but we will!"

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