

Becoming an Orthomolecular Peer Support Coach

by Robert Sealey, BSc, CA

After orthomolecular medicine helped me recover from a bipolar II mood disorder, I wondered if I could help other patients. While working as an accountant for more than 40 years, I learned to listen when clients discuss their medical issues and to encourage clients to develop effective solutions to financial and tax problems. I had no idea that peer support coaching, using those transferrable skills, would take me along such a fascinating road or that I would meet so many ill, yet wonderful people.

In 1998, I appeared in the film *Masks of Madness: Science of Healing*, a Canadian-made film which introduced Dr. Abram Hoffer and the orthomolecular treatment of serious mental illness. In that film, Abram Hoffer, PhD, MD and 6 clinicians explained their approach. The film also presented recovered patients—actor Margot Kidder, myself and 5 other patients. As patients, we shared our recovery stories and contrasted our progress (while taking orthomolecular regimens) with previous years of suffering (during episodes of schizophrenia, depression or bipolar disorder while trusting unhelpful treatments). That film was broadcast on the Discovery Channel and has been shown at orthomolecular conferences and other meetings around the world.

Several years later, a mother phoned me after seeing the film; she asked – “Could orthomolecular medicine help my daughter? Susie has schizophrenia.” Even though I am not a clinician and I had never met Susie or her mother, I could tell her that orthomolecular medicine had helped me recover. I encouraged Susie’s mother to consult Dr. Jonathan Prousky and Dr. Abram Hoffer. Several weeks later, I met Susie and her mother at the clinic of the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine in Toronto where naturopathic physician Dr. Prousky had agreed to see Susie and her mother.

Within one week of starting her orthomolecular regimen, Susie began to feel better. Ortho-care facilitated Susie’s recovery. Her regimen complemented

Susie’s other treatments—safely and effectively. I know very little about Susie’s medical history; her confidential details are none of my business, but I understand that ortho-care added a restorative dimension to Susie’s other treatments. Her loving mother’s support and Susie’s recovery were inspiring.

Sharing my information seemed to help Susie find restorative care. That reminded me of when I was very ill and needed help myself; another ‘depressed’ patient mentioned *The Journal of Orthomolecular Medicine*. When I visited the North York office of that journal, the editor, Steven Carter, suggested a short reading list with several books by Dr. Hoffer. Those books taught me that a regimen of vital amines, trace minerals, amino acids and other nutritional supplements can treat underlying metabolic issues involved with schizophrenia, depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder. Optimum doses can help patients restore their mental health. The content of those orthomolecular books was much more encouraging than other books about depression and bipolar disorder, which I had already read.

Intrigued by the concept of restoring mental health, I ‘consulted’ several physician-authors by studying their books carefully. *The Way Up from Down* by Dr. Priscilla Slagle (an orthomolecular psychiatrist from California), described her recovery taking an orthomolecular regimen (which resolved her own depression after her previous treatments with talk therapy and antidepressants did not help). Dr. Slagle’s recovery prompted me to try the approach outlined in her book. Within a few weeks, I felt much better. I do not recommend self-treatment, but I do encourage people to read about orthomolecular medicine and consult competent health professionals. If doctors dismiss ortho-care, patients can use the referral list on www.orthomed.org to find an orthomolecular clinician in their area.

I kept thinking that if orthomolecular medicine could help me recover after 28 years of episodes of depression,

anxiety and bipolar disorder, perhaps I could help others. While becoming a peer support coach, I learned to listen to people's stories, respect their symptoms and encourage their search for quality care. At appropriate times, I share some of my experiences and gently, but firmly suggest that patients can read about orthomolecular medicine and consult health professionals (who can offer second opinions, advise about diagnosis, suggest complementary treatments and monitor progress).

For the best part of ten years, Dr. Abram Hoffer kindly encouraged my efforts to understand orthomolecular medicine, write about the layman's perspective and pay forward information that saved my life. Even though he had a heavy workload as a researcher, physician, psychiatrist, clinician, author, editor and educator, Abram Hoffer maintained a world-wide network of orthomolecular physicians, researchers, patients, friends and families.

Abram Hoffer's discoveries have yet to receive the wide recognition they deserve. After he died in 2009, I wrote *Remembering Abram Hoffer, PhD, MD, by Reviewing his Books* to encourage the public to read Abram Hoffer's many remarkable books and learn about his research, discoveries and clinical success. Those books still read fresh and clear today. Even if patients are very ill, a few good books can teach readers how orthomolecular health professionals practice, what orthomolecular regimens involve and how restorative regimens can complement other treatments. Many patients are too sick to read complicated medical books, but Abram Hoffer's 35 books explain things clearly. Hoffer's books can help laymen as well as health professionals.

When speaking to other patients who may be unwell, suffering or deteriorating, it is important for a peer supporter to communicate respect, interest and encouragement. Peer support can be offered by individuals who have studied the literature about peer support, learned counselling techniques and qualified as peer supporters. In my experience, a recovered orthomolecular patient can also provide informal peer support.

A peer support coach can encourage patients to consult orthomolecular health professionals. Some patients agree to ask for diagnostic tests and seek second opinions (standard medical practices) within a few weeks or

months, but in other cases, it takes years before patients speak up for themselves. Many patients have been given one or more labels from the D.S.M. (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) before their doctors have done any medical tests or tried to diagnose the root cause(s) of their symptoms. Many patients feel stigmatized by their diagnoses. I have spoken to quite a few depressed and anxious people and people suffering with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, ADHD and autism. I have also spoken to people who were not just 'depressed', but actually had other health problems such as cancer, arthritis, haemochromatosis, thyroid conditions, pernicious anemia, hormone deficiencies or food sensitivities. All those conditions can be treated with orthomolecular regimens.

In the 1950s, when Dr. Abram Hoffer, Dr. Humphrey Osmond and their colleagues started their research, they considered possible cause(s) of psychosis and they developed 'restorative' treatments for patients with schizophrenia. Their first patients suffered with hallucinations, depression and anxiety. Some of those patients also had food allergies or sensitivities and others were self-medicating with alcohol. As pioneering orthomolecular doctors, psychiatrists Hoffer and Osmond used a 2-step approach. First they applied the best practices of conventional medicine. They listened to patients; they ordered medical and metabolic tests; they noticed symptoms and they diagnosed carefully. Then they considered whether disorders of metabolism were causing or contributing to patients' symptoms. They assessed patients' responses to previous treatments and they customized regimens of vitamins and other essential nutrients. By prescribing optimum doses of vital amines (i.e. vitamins), trace minerals, amino acids and other healthy biochemicals normally present in the human body, they helped a surprising number of psychotic patients recover from schizophrenia. Patients' hallucinations, depressions and anxieties resolved. As long as they continued their treatments, those patients could live normally. Recovery from schizophrenia until a patient could resume normal or near-normal living was unheard of at that time. Sustained recovery from a serious mental illness is still a rare outcome today.

Orthomolecular regimens have to be customized based on each patient's diagnosis and biochemical individuality; unfortunately few 'modern' doctors know how to practice orthomolecular medicine. As a peer supporter, I know that unless depressed, anxious

or psychotic patients get restorative care, some may deteriorate and lose hope. While patients are ill, how can they ask for ortho-care if they have never heard of it? It is not easy for patients to find 'restorative' care. However, most patients can ask qualified health professionals for conventional care: testing, diagnosing and treating. Patients can ask their family doctors for basic medical tests and referrals to specialists. Then patients can consult orthomolecular health professionals who know how to prescribe and fine-tune complementary regimens.

As a peer supporter, I have not been able to assist everyone who calls. Some people refuse to cooperate; others will not listen. Some don't want to read; others get stuck in self-defeating patterns, drinking too much or taking drugs. Even so, most of the people who contact me are surprised to learn about orthomolecular medicine. Those who find competent care and cooperate by taking the recommended regimen are pleased when orthomolecular medicine helps them recover.

Unfortunately, I was not able to share my information with a family friend, who killed herself at age 18. She died before I was told that she had 'depression' and before I could share any information with her or her parents. The searing pain of that young lady's untimely death prompted me to write a book called *Finding Care for Depression* and speak about my experiences of depression in public (which I found difficult to do). After I read a newspaper article about another woman whose young adult son had schizophrenia, I contacted her, suggested orthomolecular books and referred her to Dr. Prousky. That mother refused to consider that ortho-care might help her son. Sadly that young man killed himself.

In another case, I shared my recovery story with a retired chap who had been depressed for >35 years. Several years before, he had consulted an orthomolecular doctor in the US and he felt better for one year while taking an orthomolecular regimen which that doctor recommended. After he stopped that treatment, he relapsed. Years had passed and he had all but forgotten how well he felt on his restorative program. His prescription brain pills were not helping and he was self-medicating with alcohol. Sadly that gentleman killed himself before he could restart his restorative regimen.

When speaking to a person who has suffered repeated

episodes of depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or psychosis, I ask if patients are experiencing 'brain pain'. Suicide may seem like a permanent 'solution' for intolerable pain. If they have thoughts about harming themselves, I explain that orthomolecular medicine can complement other treatments and help them recover.

Thanks to the inspiring leadership and the important work of Dr. Abram Hoffer and Dr. Humphrey Osmond and their colleagues who researched and developed restorative regimens and wrote books and articles to educate the public, orthomolecular medicine exists today as a restorative dimension of care. Over the past 18 years, I have been humbled and honoured to introduce orthomolecular medicine to a succession of people. Some of these people I met working as an accountant; others spoke to me at conferences or meetings; still other people e-mailed after hearing about my books, articles or web site.

Orthomolecular medicine does help many of the people who contact me. If they have never heard about it before, I suggest web sites and a short reading list. Open-minded patients can use my information to find better quality care. Callers have had a surprising range of diagnoses. As happened to me for 28 years before I became an orthomolecular patient, many of these patients had not been diagnosed properly. Others have D.S.M. labels such as 'depression', but no safe or effective care. As a peer supporter, I do not diagnose or treat anybody. By law, only health professionals can offer medical care. As a recovered patient-turned-author-peer-supporter, I merely listen to patients' stories, respect their realities, share teaching tales, suggest a few books and encourage patients to find quality care.

This article explains that even though orthomolecular medicine has been researched and found safe and effective since the 1950s and even though thousands of patients have recovered, ortho-care remains little-known. I believe that recovered patients can support the **International Schizophrenia Foundation** and its orthomolecular public education campaign. If you have recovered from a mental illness or a medical problem by adding a complementary and restorative regimen to your other treatments, please consider becoming a peer supporter. If you are willing to chat about orthomolecular medicine with other patients, families or friends, the information you share could save lives.

References

Books

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- by Abram Hoffer, PhD, MD Order from amazon.ca or abebooks.com
Adventures in Psychiatry: The Scientific Memoirs of Dr. Abram Hoffer
How to Live with Schizophrenia
Orthomolecular Treatment of Schizophrenia
-
- by Robert Sealey, BSc, CA (free at www.searpubl.ca)
Remembering Abram Hoffer, PhD, MD by Reviewing his Books
Finding Care for Depression
90-Day Plan for Finding Quality Care
-
- by Dr. Priscilla Slagle (free at www.thewayupfromdown.com)
The Way Up from Down
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Archives

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- The Journal of Orthomolecular Medicine* (free archives at www.orthomed.org)
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Conference

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- Orthomolecular Medicine Today* April (2016) Vancouver, (2017) Toronto
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Film

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- Masks of Madness: Science of Healing* (free excerpt at www.orthomed.org)
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- International Schizophrenia Foundation www.orthomed.org
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