When Kathy Flaherty first saw “Next to Normal” at the Bushnell in Hartford years ago, it hit close to home. The Tony and Pulitzer Prize winning rock musical, which opens Friday at TheaterWorks in Hartford, centers on a mother struggling with worsening bipolar disorder — a story that resounded with Flaherty, who is in recovery from the same illness.

Flaherty, along with BHN President Pat Rehmer and “Next to Normal” director Rob Ruggiero, were guests on this month’s episode of “Health Care Matters,” Hartford HealthCare’s radio series on WTIC, discussing the upcoming run of the show, mental health, discrimination and the arts.

“I think the play does a good job of making some of the experiences of dealing with the label of a bipolar diagnosis very real,” Flaherty said. “It does capture the challenges that are faced by the family members, the challenges that are faced by the person who is labeled with the diagnosis.”

Flaherty was in her first year at Harvard law school when she received her bipolar diagnosis. During her undergradu-
showed up for one appointment in October 1990, she was confronted by her psychiatrist and her father, who had traveled from Connecticut, and was hospitalized for 60 days.

“[My parents] were worried and confused,” Flaherty said. “It was a side of my personality they had not seen. Between the non-stop talking, really fast talking, not staying on track, incredible irritability. It was just not the person they recognized sending off to school in late August.”

“When the doctors at McLean [Hospital] placed a diagnosis, it was a huge relief for them because it was something they could work with,” she said.

Rehmer emphasized that stories like Flaherty’s and “Next to Normal” can be a source of hope for others with mental illness or substance use disorders.

“I strongly believe in the recovery model, and people who get these diagnoses, with peer support, can and do recover, and that’s critical,” Rehmer said.

In addition to giving hope, these stories have the opportunity to combat the stigma and discrimination that surround behavioral health.

“I am a cancer survivor, and I can tell you that six weeks after surgery, I had a full dinner brought to my house literally every single night. I can bet that Kathy didn’t have that done for her,” Rehmer said. “It gets back to the fact that people are uncomfortable. They don’t know what to do with this. Part of my mission is always to hit on the issue of discrimination and the fact that people with mental health issues or substance abuse issues are often discriminated in a real way.”

Rehmer and Flaherty will discuss the issue of stigma and discrimination in mental health on April 11 at one of four TalkBack Tuesday events that run in conjunction with “Next to Normal” showings. (See box at right to learn more.)

All Hartford HealthCare employees will receive a 15 percent discount on tickets for “Next to Normal”, which runs Tuesdays through Sunday starting Friday, March 24 and ending Sunday, April 30.

For more information on “Next to Normal,” visit www.theaterworkshartford.org. Tickets can be purchased by calling the TheaterWorks box office at 860.527.7838, Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. When calling, mention that you are an HHC employee in order to receive your 15 percent discount.

TalkBack Tuesdays

- An intimate, post-show chat with the cast and special guests. Tickets bought for these Tuesday shows will include admission to TalkBack Tuesdays. You do not need to be attending the show to attend the Talk Back Tuesdays.

- April 4: Creative Team Talkbacks (Cast)
  Post-show chat with the cast and the creative team as they discuss the process of bringing “Next to Normal” to the TheaterWorks stage.

- April 11: “Where’s the Casserole?”
  Stigma and Discrimination in Mental Health featuring Pat Rehmer MSN, ACHE, SVP, Behavioral Health Hartford HealthCare and Kathy Flaherty, Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project.

- April 18: “A Dose of Reality”
  Facing the opioid crisis in America featuring Craig Allen, MD, and a family member. Health and Human Services has declared that we as a country are in the midst of an opioid overdose epidemic. In 2014, more than 28,000 people died from opioid overdose, and at least half of those deaths involved a prescription opioid (hhs.gov). In “Next to Normal,” daughter Natalie reaches into her mother’s medicine cabinet to cope. Listen in as experts connect the play to this pressing current event.

- April 25: “There Will Be Light”
  Journey to Wellness and Recovery featuring Harold Schwartz, MD, Institute of Living Psychiatrist-in-Chief and Vice President, Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network and Karen Kangas, Director of Recovery and Family Affairs, Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network. “Next to Normal” explores many paths to wellness and recovery ending with the hope that, “There Will Be Light.” This talkback conversation will delve into all the ways Diana ventures to find recovery.
Join us and walk for awareness

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in Connecticut will be hosting its annual NAMI Walk to support mental health awareness on Saturday, May 20, at Bushnell Park in Hartford.

The Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network will be a sponsor for this event, and we are looking for employees at each of the entities within BHN (Backus and HOCC behavioral health units, Institute of Living, Windham Hospital, Natchaug and Rushford) to sign up as captains to encourage staff to join the BHN walking team. We are hoping for a strong BHN representation at the event. Contact Amanda Nappi at amanda.nappi@hhchealth.org for additional help or with questions.

BHN president to be among panelists at ‘Working Women’ event

BHN President Pat Rehmer will be among the panelists at a free community forum, “Working Women: The New Face of Addiction” on April 6 from 5-7:30 p.m. at the New Britain Museum of American Art. The forum, hosted by the Connecticut Health Investigative Team, in collaboration with Wheeler Clinic, will discuss the rise in opioid-related addiction in women.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 3,300 women begin taking opioids each day — a rate 25 percent higher than men — and in Connecticut, more than 420 women died of drug overdoses in 2015 and 2016.

Women are more likely than men to have chronic pain, and are more likely to be given higher doses of opioid pain relievers, use them for longer periods of time, and become dependent on them more quickly than men, according to the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

For more information or to register for the event, visit C-HIT.org.

About BHNews

BHNews is published every other Friday. Story ideas or submissions may be sent to amanda.nappi@hhchealth.org. Articles must be submitted as a Word document. Every effort will be made to run the article in its entirety, but due to space constraints and style requirements, editing may be necessary.

Deadline for the next edition of BHNews is Tuesday, April 4, at noon.
Aetna partnership helps with Apple Watch price

Hartford HealthCare employees can buy an Apple Watch with a $75 discount from Aetna. The promotion is part of a partnership between Aetna and Apple designed to help employees stay active, track their health and keep track of their insurance.

From practicing mindfulness to reaching fitness goals, Apple Watch is designed to help you stay active, healthy, and productive throughout the day — right from your wrist.

Employees of Hartford HealthCare will be able to purchase an Apple Watch online and pay for it with a credit card or, if they are eligible, spread the cost over a year, using interest-free payroll deductions. To learn more, including purchasing instructions, click on the Wellness Incentives page of HHC Connect.

Anything to share?

Are you interested in sharing your clinical experience or knowledge with co-workers throughout the HHC Behavioral Health Network? Consider submitting an article to the Clinical Corner. For more information, e-mail amanda.nappi@hhchealth.org.

We have momentum

Feel it. Share it. Build it.

Momentum is Hartford HealthCare’s new internal social media platform. With just a couple of keyboard clicks you can say “thank you” and share your thoughts.

Make someone’s day.

Visit HHC Connect to get started.

We care for the doctors who care for you.
That’s why we’re saying thanks.

On National Doctors’ Day, we offer heartfelt thanks to the more than 3,000 doctors who practice throughout Hartford HealthCare. Their skills, expertise and compassion make a difference every day in the lives of our patients and families. To connect with one of our great physicians, call 1.855.HHC.HERE. (1.855.442.4373)
The IOL Family Resource Center (FRC) holds regular support groups. For additional information, please contact the FRC at 860.545.7665 or 860.545.1888. All programs are free of charge and, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Massachusetts Cottage, First Floor Group Room at the IOL Campus, 200 Retreat Ave., Hartford. The upcoming IOL FRC Support Group schedule is as follows:

**Support Group For Those Coping With A New Or Chronic Medical Condition.** March 24, April 7, 14, 21, 28 (Every Friday), 1 - 2 p.m. in the Center Building, First Floor Conference Room. For young adults ages 17-26 struggling with a new diagnosis, chronic medical conditions, physical symptoms or limitations. The group will help with difficult losses and limitations due to a medical condition, and build a positive, future-oriented focus with realistic goals. To RSVP, please call Elizabeth Alve-Hedegaard, APRN, at 860.545.7050.

**Depression Bipolar Support Alliance Group (DBSA).** March 27, April 3, 10, 17, 24 (Every Monday), noon – 1 p.m. in the Todd Building, Bunker Room and March 29, April 5, 12, 19, 26 (Every Wednesday), 7 – 8 p.m. in the Commons Building, 2nd Floor, Litchfield Room. Peer run support group for those who have been diagnosed with depression or bipolar disorder.

**Alcoholics Anonymous.** March 28, April 4, 11, 18, 25 (Every Tuesday), 12:30-1:30 p.m. Join us for coffee and a one-hour topic discussion. To learn more, contact the AA General Service Office at 212-870-3400 or P.O. Box 459, New York, NY 10163.

**Schizophrenia: An Introduction To The Disorder.** March 28, June 20, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This program is for family and friends of individuals who have schizophrenia or a related disorder. It will present a basic understanding of the disorder, its treatment, along with suggestions to help family members and friends cope with the illness.

**Hearing Voices Network (HVN).** March 30, April 6, 13, 20, 27 (Every Thursday), 5 - 6:30 p.m. in the Todd Building, Bunker Room. Peer run support group based firmly on a belief of self-help, mutual respect and understanding where people can safely share their experiences of voices, visions, unusual sensory perceptions. The groups offer an opportunity for people to accept and find meaning in their experiences that help them regain power over their lives.

**Al-Anon Parent Group.** March 30, April 6, 13, 20, 27 (Every Thursday), 7 - 8 p.m. One hour topic discussion.

Join us during Mental Health Month (May 2017) for any or all of the group meetings to help you and your child with mental illness

**Managing Your Child’s Mental Health**

A group series for parents and caregivers

**Thursdays • 6 - 7:30 p.m.**
Hartford Room, Commons Building, 2nd Floor

Facilitated by: Jeevitha Kempegowda, Psy.D.

Discussion topics will include:

- May 4: Understanding mental health in children
- May 11: Helping my child and I cope with mental health stigma (Facing judgment and criticism from others)
- May 18: Play-based activities to manage aggression and impulse control
- May 25: Helping my child who has experienced trauma
- June 1: Helping myself (Self-care for caregivers)

RSVP by May 1
Call 860-545-7706
or e-mail jeevitha.kempegowda@hhchealth.org

National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Week • May 1 – 7
National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day • May 4

Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network
Family Resource Center Support Groups (continued)

- **Dementia Support/Educational Group Meeting.** April 4, May 2, June 6 (First Tuesday of each month), 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the Donnelly Conference Room, First Floor. Please join us as we bring together experts and those who want guidance, direction, and support. Space is limited — reservations are required by calling 860.545.7665.

- **Support Group For Families Dealing With Major Mental Illness.** April 6, 20, May 4, 18, June 1, 15 (First and third Thursday of each month), 5:15 - 6:30 p.m. in the Center Building, First Floor Conference Room. For family and friends of individuals who have schizophrenia, bipolar or other related disorders. Share your success and struggles. Learn to care for yourself while caring for others.

- **Anxiety Disorders: An Introduction.** April 11, June 27, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This lecture is for families and friends of individuals who have an anxiety disorder or a related disorder. Participants will acquire a basic understanding of anxiety disorders, their treatments and suggestions to help them better cope with the illness.

- **Social Support Group — LGBTQ Issues (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Questioning).** April 12, 26, May 10, 24, June 14, 28 (Second and fourth Wednesday of each month), 5 – 6:15 p.m. in the Center Building, Young Adult Service Group Room. Support group for 16- to 23-year-olds who identify LGBTQ issues as being prominent in their lives. The goal is to discuss support strategies to manage life challenges.

- **Substance Use Educational And Support Group.** April 13, May 11, June 8 (Second Thursday of each month), 4 – 5 p.m. For family members impacted by loved ones with substance abuse.

- **Autism Spectrum Support/Educational Group Meeting For Parents.** April 19, May 17, June 21 (Third Wednesday of the month), 6 – 7 p.m. Providing a place for parents of children on the autism spectrum, or with another related disorder, to come together and get support and information. Monthly, peer-run support groups interspersed with special guests and speakers to offer additional guidance and perspective.

- **Yoga.** April 25, May 30, June 27, 5 - 6 p.m. in the Commons Building, Hartford Room. Open to adult staff and family members. Mats are provided or bring your own! The class begins with breathing exercises and gentle stretches, followed by a series of poses and ends with relaxation and meditation. Instructor: Valerie Raggio, LCSW, Yoga Fit, Level 1 Certified. To RSVP or inquire, call the FRC at 860.545.7716 or email laura.durst@hhchealth.org

- **Introduction To Mental Health Benefits and Services.** May 23, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This presentation will provide an overview of benefit programs available for individuals with mental health disabilities.

- **Dementia Lecture: An Introduction.** May 30, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This program is for family members and friends of individuals who have dementia or a related disorder. It will present a basic understanding of the disorder, its treatment, along with specific suggestions to help family members and friends better cope with the illness.

Fred or Santa?

The bust of Frederick Law Olmstead on the grounds of the Institute of Living looked a little different after the most recent snowstorm. Photo courtesy of Charlie Caley, PharmD, BCPP, clinical profession at the UConn School of Pharmacy and head of the UConn fellowship training in psychopharmacology at the IOL.
Education conference addresses bullying

More than 50 Natchaug school employees joined educators from other BHN schools and private special education schools from across the state for the Connecticut Association of Private Special Education Facilities (CAPSEF) Conference at the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford. The subject of the March 15 conference was the prevention of bullying, with presentations by Patricia A. Ciccone, Superintendent of Schools in Westbrook, and Rachel’s Challenge.

Natchaug therapy dog named Pet of the Year

Natchaug pet therapy dog Barney, who is featured in the Every Moment Matters program, was named the 2017 Pet of the Year by the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA).

The Pet of the Year award is given out annually to an animal who through unselfish and extraordinary behavior, exemplifies the affection, loyalty, security and value of the human-animal bond.

Barney, and his owner Betsy Tubridy, will be honored at the CVMA Annual Meeting & Awards Luncheon on Tuesday, March 28 at the Water’s Edge Resort & Spa in Westbrook.
As part of their recovery program as clients at Rushford’s Stonehaven program, Steven Sokolowski and William Pugh were recently asked to share their stories of addiction and despair with a group of adolescent clients at Rushford’s Stonegate campus in Durham.

Looking out on the teenage faces in the audience, Sokolowski said he was immediately struck by one thing. “I looked at those faces, and I felt like they were all me, a younger version of me,” said Sokolowski, who is in recovery for addiction to crack cocaine and other substances. The father of a 24-year-old son, Sokolowski said he grew up in New Haven where he fell in with gangs and sold drugs, going to prison and getting shot several times in drug feuds. He said he decided to pursue treatment for his addiction so that he could finally earn the respect of his son, and present him with a better model as a father.

Pugh, who is recovering after more than 17 years of heroin addiction, said he too wants a chance at a better life. Both he and Sokolowski said the opportunity to share their stories with adolescent clients at Stonegate only strengthens their resolve to continue with their recovery.

Greg Hogan, the director at Stonehaven, said the effort to have Stonehaven clients share their stories with Stonegate clients benefits both programs. “Because of their backgrounds, these clients are able to connect with the adolescents in uniquely powerful and intimate way,” he said.

After they finished talking with the group, Sokolowski and Pugh were each approached by many of the adolescents individually. “They wanted to know how I did it, how I was able to change my life,” said Pugh, who now aspires to be a writer. He shared one of his poems, called “You’re Not Alone,” with the adolescents during his presentation. “I hope the poem helped show them that there are other people going through the same thing they are,” he said.

Sokolowski said he was approached by one young man who was eager to hear more about his story. The young man had dreams of being a rap music star, and Sokolowski told him that staying in school would be the best way to chase that dream. “He asked me if I would ever come back, and I promised him I would,” said Sokolowski, who is now taking courses at Middlesex Community College with the goal of one day becoming an addiction counselor.

Both Pugh and Sokolowski arrived at Stonehaven seeking treatment about the same time last year, and they have learned to rely on each other to support their recovery as well as their commitment to the 12-Step recovery program.

The ability to share their message with young people at Stonegate further reinforces the track they are on, they said. “I wish I had something like this when I was that age,” said Pugh.

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**BHN communications specialist bids farewell**

Matt Burgard, who has served as a senior communications specialist for Rushford, the Institute of Living and the Hartford HealthCare Cancer Institute, has accepted a position with the Commonwealth Care Alliance in Boston.

Matt joined Hartford HealthCare in 2013 as a communications specialist for The Hospital of Central Connecticut, eventually becoming senior communications specialist for the Behavioral Health Network and the Cancer Institute. Matt has contributed much with his writing, his “can-do” attitude and humanistic qualities.

Those attributes should serve him well in his new organization. The Commonwealth Care Alliance provides medical care for under-served populations to its members at their home, nursing home, group home, doctor’s office, or hospital, as well as other locations. Services encompass primary medical care, behavioral health, social support, and long-term programs and support.

Matt’s last day on the job was Tuesday, March 21. While the hiring process is ongoing, please send your communications or marketing needs to Amanda Nappi at amanda.nappi@hhhealth.org.
Baby simulators donated to Rushford Academy

Students at Rushford Academy will have the opportunity to experience parenthood over the next two weeks thanks to two infant simulator dolls donated by Planned Parenthood.

The babies — one boy and one girl — are programmed to cry when they need to be changed, eat, burp or rocked. Each boy will have a baby for a 24-hour period and will bring them to school and wherever else they may go.

The students are also taking weekly Planned Parenthood classes and working on healthy sexuality practices, in addition to the infant simulator project.

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Join this community conversation... to listen and learn from each other and work together to support mental wellness with meaningful action.

Compassion Counts: A Community Conversation
Opioid Addiction - There is Hope, Healing & Recovery

Friday, April 7, 2017
11:30 - 1:30 pm
Russell Library Hubbard Room
123 Broad St., Middletown

Light lunch will be served

INTRODUCTIONS
Miriam E. Dephin-Rittmon, Ph.D., Commissioner / Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services

MODERATOR
Celeste Cremin-Endes, Chief Executive Officer / DMHAS, River Valley Services

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
Jeffrey T. Shelton, M.D., Chair, Department of Psychiatry / Middlesex Hospital

PANELISTS
Persons of lived experience with addiction and recovery

This is a FREE event.
You may register online at https://compassioncounts2017opioidaddiction.eventbrite.com.
For more information: Contact Megan Goodfield at megan.goodfield@ct.gov

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Do you know how much money you will need in retirement? Are you taking too much or too little risk with your investments? Do you know Hartford HealthCare provides retirement education and planning resources at no cost to you?
Find out how your account is performing. Learn about planning tools and educational resources. Ask questions about long term strategies and feel more confident about your potential retirement income.
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Email: daniel.dionne@prudential.com
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Are you planning for your retirement?