



Capital Area Parkinson's Society

September 2014 Newsletter

P.O. Box 27565, Austin, Texas 78755-2565

www.capitalareaparkinsons.org

Robin Williams, PD and Depression

Robin Elliott, Parkinson's Disease Foundation, August 21, 2014

The media response to the tragic suicide of the gifted actor Robin Williams has included much speculation about a possible connection between his recent diagnosis with Parkinson's disease, or the medicines used to treat it, with the depression that apparently prompted him to take his life.

At the Parkinson's Disease Foundation, we are not privy to the details of his diagnosis, or the prescriptions he may have used to treat it. Nor do we have any information about any other drugs he is rumored to have used, or whether these may have contributed to his depression.

What we do know is that the speculations and purported explanations swirling around the issue have become a serious source of anxiety among individuals and families who are touched by Parkinson's and have been led to believe that they or their loved ones may be at risk of depression of the kind that afflicted Mr. Williams.

To ease their anxieties, and clarify the situation for us all, it may be helpful if we were to summarize those things we do know about the link between Parkinson's disease, and the drugs that are used to treat it, and depression.

First, we do know that depression is frequently a symptom of Parkinson's. In fact, more than half of people with PD experience some symptoms of depression and anxiety during the course of the disease. And 30 percent of people with PD experience depression before a PD diagnosis.

Second, there are several medicines that—under the supervision of an experienced physician, typically described as a movement disorders specialist—can ease the depression that may come with PD, usually without significant side-effects on PD symptoms.

Third, it is true that some drugs commonly prescribed for Parkinson's disease—most notably the class of drugs known as dopamine agonists—can, in perhaps 10-15 percent of cases, cause impulsive behaviors (e.g., eating, gambling). These behaviors can usually be eased by stopping the medication (slowly, under the care of a doctor) or by switching to a different one. Suicide is not among these behaviors. Sinemet®, the gold-standard PD drug that is used sooner or later by almost all who live with Parkinson's, can sometimes cause hallucinations, but only at very high doses that are typically prescribed much later in the disease.

Fourth and most importantly, among the three main classes of PD medications typically prescribed in early PD, there is no evidence of links to suicide.

The take-home message is that for many people, Parkinson's often involves depression, but this condition, in the right hands, can usually be managed, effectively or completely. As in all areas of medicine, the key is the competence and experience of the doctor.

At PDF, we maintain a roster of more than 500 doctors who are trained and experienced with Parkinson's disease. We encourage people with PD, with concerns about depression to speak to their doctors, and if they need help finding one, [call our HelpLine at \(800\) 457-6676](tel:8004576676) or email us at info@pdf.org.



**Saturday
October 18, 2014
(in lieu of monthly membership meeting)**

**CAPS
Annual
Health Fair**

Come learn about the valuable community resources here in Austin. Healthcare providers and agencies from the Central Texas area will be on hand to provide information about transportation, home healthcare, therapy dogs and more!

**There will also be fun activities, great food and door prizes. It's all free and it's all for you.
Bring a guest and your questions!**

Like us on Facebook and Twitter and find the latest information, ways to volunteer and even make a donation.

www.facebook.com/CapitalAreaParkinsonsSociety

www.twitter.com/CAPSAustin



On Sale Now!

CAPS Tote Bags
\$10.00 each

Durable, washable and environmental! Proceeds go to support CAPS services.

Pick them up while supplies last at our monthly membership meetings or email Susie Lightfoot-Scherr at lightfoot_78759@yahoo.com or call her at 512-657-1975.

Help promote awareness of CAPS and the work we do!

New PFP Class

Fitness for Parkinson's (Lorin Wilson)
Fridays 11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.



Belmont Village
4310 Bee Cave Road
West Lake Hills

Starting
September 5th

New Monthly Simultaneous Support Groups, Care Partners and Patients with Parkinson's

Covenant Presbyterian Church
Second Tuesday of each month
10:15 a.m.

You will meet in separate rooms at the same time.

Join us for our first meeting September 9th!

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September Membership Meeting

Saturday, September 20 ■ 2:00 p.m.
Medical Office Building, St. David's Medical Center
5th Floor Conference Room, 3000 N. IH-35



Dr. Steve Springer, L.P.C., C.P.M., will speak to us about "Depression and PD: A Person with Parkinson's Personal Perspective." Dr. Springer is an Associate Professor in the Department of Occupational, Workforce, and Leadership Studies at Texas State University. He holds a doctorate in Adult and Extension Education with support areas in vocational counseling and educational administration from Texas A&M and a Masters in Psychology and Guidance from Our Lady of the Lake in San Antonio.

Dr. Springer is a licensed professional counselor, as well as a retired Colonel in the Texas State Guard, and is currently working on research related to college instructors assisting service members who are exhibiting signs of PTSD.