



A PUBLICATION OF NATIONAL DEAF ACADEMY

WINTER 2005

NDA UPDATE

ALAN M. COHEN, M.D.

## A New Chapter Begins...

Dear Families and Friends:

It is with both a heavy heart, and a spring in my step, that I announce Jim and Jennifer Tresh's departure from National Deaf Academy.

As many of you already know, I met Jim and Jennifer in 1998 while serving as the Medical Director of a residential treatment center in Maitland, Florida. At that time they were attempting to integrate a Deaf track into an existing Hearing program, and subsequently asked me to serve as their primary psychiatrist. Having had little experience with Deaf children and adolescents, I quickly learned about Deaf culture and the unique aspects of working with a hearing impaired population. I learned not only from Jim and Jennifer but also from many of the incredible staff members that were part of their original company, and continue to work at NDA today. Later, when an opportunity to purchase what became the current NDA campus presented itself, Jim and Jennifer and I formed a partnership. I subsequently purchased



*As a new chapter begins, NDA continues to expand its resources with the construction of the Grossman Activity Center. This is a 10,000 square foot state-of-the-art facility with athletic, recreational and vocational space geared to the unique needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing residents.*

the land and set out over the next six months to renovate and design a new facility that would be focused solely on the psychiatric care of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children, adolescents and adults from around the world.

National Deaf Academy opened in October of 2000, and since that time has expanded from 36 to 82 beds, with almost 200 staff members serving residents from four countries and 28 different states. The Charter School at National Deaf Academy became the only exclusively Deaf, publicly-funded academic program in the State of Florida in 2001. We recently completed our first major survey under the Joint Commission for the Accreditation of Hospitals. I will always be grateful to Jim and Jennifer for the insight they provided, the hard work they contributed, and the passion they displayed in educating me over the past five years. The entire staff joins me in wishing them well as they seek new opportunities both professionally and personally.

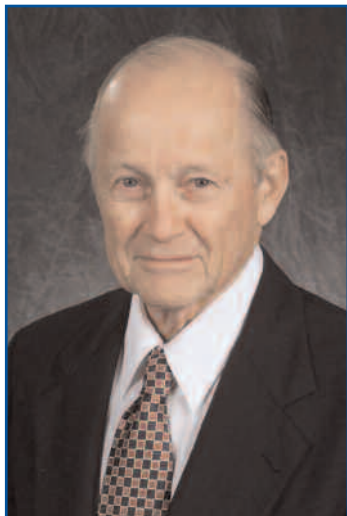
*NDA Update, continued on page 4*

**2005 NDA Conference Details Enclosed!**

# UNsung HEROES: MENTAL HEALTH TECHNICIANS



BY: MCCAY VERNON, PH.D  
Chairman of the NDA Advisory Board



Mental Health Technician (MHT) is National Deaf Academy's title for the staff person on the frontline in residential treatment centers for mentally ill youth and adults. They are the people who are with the patients in face-to-face contact at all times, except for when the patients are with their therapists in one-to-one or family therapy sessions.

These staff members also

function as teacher's assistants in the classroom during the school day.

Responsibility for implementing a large part of the behavior plan the National Deaf Academy (NDA) develops for each individual patient rests upon their shoulders. This huge responsibility, coupled with the intensive contact with mentally disordered individuals, is clearly not an easy task. However, no residential care facility can be successful without motivated, perceptive MHTs. In many respects they are the backbone of any good residential center. For this reason, NDA places a high priority on hiring bright, sensitive people interested in mental health as MHTs.

## The Mental Health Technician Staff at NDA

At NDA we have 102 Mental Health Technicians, of whom 66 are Deaf and 36 are Hearing. NDA places a strong emphasis on the importance of Deaf staff in general, especially in positions involving a lot of direct care of patients. Nothing is more critical in mental health treatment than good communication. Therefore all of our Deaf MHTs are fluent users of American Sign Language, as are nearly all of our Hearing MHTs. Attendance in on campus sign language classes is required for staff members needing to improve their signing skills. The reason we hire persons adept at sign language is because most of our Deaf patients use some form of sign language as their basic mode of communication. The Deaf MHTs are also intimately aware of Deaf culture, which is a critical factor in understanding Deaf patients.

Overall, NDA employs 187 individuals, of whom 88 are Deaf. Educationally, 25 percent of the MHTs have Bachelor's Degrees, another 25 percent have some college, and the remaining 50 percent are high school graduates. At NDA a great emphasis is placed on staff education through mentoring, supervision, monthly in-service trainings, etc. All MHTs go through drug testing and background screening. They are trained in emergency management, fire safety, disaster readiness, infection control, medical chart documentation, therapeutic boundaries, confidentiality, water and bicycle safety, CPR and first aid.

Dr. Alan Cohen, NDA Medical Director and CEO, along with Elena Moore, Director of Community Relations, recently visited Gallaudet University. While there they joined Dr. William McCrone of NDA's Advisory Board and Gallaudet's Mental Health Counseling Department. Together they met with I. King Jordan, President of Gallaudet University, and key members of his faculty. The purpose of the visit was to develop distant learning and other teaching methods that will enable MHTs to advance their careers by earning college credits while on the NDA campus. It is NDA's hope to develop a collaborative educational relationship with Gallaudet University.

There is no better experience possible for a person wanting to go into the mental health field than to work in a residential treatment center as an MHT. The opportunities the position offers for extensive interaction with patients is priceless.

## Who Becomes an MHT at NDA

Many of our MHTs are young adults who are not only interested in a job, but are hoping to find a profession. Those who are Deaf are often attracted to the fact that NDA is a Deaf-friendly work environment in which many of their co-workers are also Deaf. This is a rare benefit for a Deaf person in a job setting. Some MHTs have had experience as residence hall counselors in schools or other settings before coming to NDA. Hearing people are drawn to NDA and the unique opportunity to hone one's sign language skills in an all-Deaf environment, while learning about mental health.

*Unsung Heroes: Mental Health Technicians, continued on page 4*

# YOUR KIDS & MINE



BY: ALAN M. COHEN, M.D.  
NDA Medical Director



*Dear Dr Cohen:*

*I know that this isn't a big problem, but would you mind addressing this whole issue of New Year's resolutions? At the end of every school year, before the kids go out on winter break, my daughter's school has the students do a writing exercise on "My Resolutions for the New Year." Unfortunately, the teachers don't follow up with the students, and I think they miss an opportunity to have them discuss real goals. What do you think?*

*Mrs. V.M., Jupiter, Florida*

**Dear V.M.:**

I have to be honest; you gave some of the NDA staff a laugh with your email, for no other reason than the timeliness of your inquiry. The very day we received your email we had discussed in our morning treatment meeting how much difficulty many of our residents have in terms of understanding time frames and the New Year. To many of our residents, winter break is just about the holidays. The subtle aspect of one year ending and another year beginning tends to be lost. In those cases, the kids may mechanically write up a list of resolutions without really "getting" the point of what they are truly being asked to think about. You have to remember, Deaf and Hard of Hearing kids frequently miss the connotations behind certain activities and idioms. As a result, it is incumbent upon their teachers, counselors and families, to spend some extra time explaining the purpose of specific exercises.

In my mind, resolutions are as much about taking stock of the past year as they are about setting goals for the upcoming year. It is important to praise individual accomplishments as well as identifying major areas of concern to be addressed in the future. I do not necessarily think that the issues raised have to all be

terribly serious, and I absolutely believe it's critical that the list be confined to a manageable number so that the kids aren't overwhelmed.

## Productive Resolutions

- Identify both strengths and weaknesses from previous year.
- Make sure the adults leading the assignment participate by sharing their own "stuff."
- Congratulate kids on what they accomplished from the previous year's list. Positively reinforce them for having the courage to identify new problems to work on in the coming year.
- Don't put the list away after New Year's Eve! Instead, put a reminder on your calendar and bring the list out every few months, asking them how they think they're doing on their goals.
- Have fun with it by making it a family tradition.

I would suggest making resolution-writing an annual family tradition. For example: Christmas night, or the day after Christmas, every member of the family gets together and discusses a few of their big accomplishments from the year. After the requisite applause, each family member goes on to identify one or two issues they want to tackle for the coming year.

The mood should not be adversarial, but rather, supportive, warm and friendly. Be sure to allow the kids to select their own issues, unless of course they ask for help. By having the adults go first, it models appropriate acceptance of responsibility for everyone else, and will keep everyone in good humor.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the suggested ritual is not putting the lists away in a drawer never to be seen again. The key to this being a productive exercise is pulling out the lists every few months so that everyone can be held accountable for what they, themselves, identified as being important to them over the coming year. Parents beware, however, because part of this involves the kids holding you accountable in the same way you will be holding them accountable. If your goal was to lose weight, and you are still eating those Oreos every night, expect the astute adolescent to correctly call you on it. To the extent that you can tolerate it, you will be demonstrating the acceptance of constructive criticism, commitment to your goals, and hopefully, a sense of humor.

**Submit your questions for  
Dr. Cohen to:**

**Elena Moore, Newsletter Editor at  
emoore@nationaldeafacademy.com**

# NDA UPDATE



*A New Chapter Begins... continued from page 1*

As we go forward, please know that National Deaf Academy has never been stronger. In September we broke ground on a state-of-the-art 10,000 square-foot student activity center/gymnasium, expected to open in early 2005. In 2004, we completed a new adult residential building and McCay Vernon Hall. This building is an office complex dedicated to Dr. Vernon that houses private office suites, multi-media conference rooms and Deaf-friendly playrooms for our ever-enlarging staff of Masters level therapists. Melissa Watson, our Senior Clinical Director, and Matt Dray, the Director of Mental Health Technicians, will continue to work closely with other department heads to assist me in maintaining the quality of care we provide to residents, as well as the quality of life we offer to our employees. Rest assured that my twenty years of hospital management experience will guarantee that the clinical programs will remain innovative and committed to seeking new ways to reach our often challenging population.

As we prepare for the next chapter in NDA's life, I want to thank our Advisory Board and the many agencies around the world that continue to place their confidence in us. I welcome this opportunity to continue my life's work and look forward to sharing our dream with you when we meet. Until then, please feel free to contact me, or any other member of the NDA family, for information about the extraordinary work we do.

Sincerely,

Alan Cohen, M.D.

## New NDA Website

**Look for National Deaf Academy's new website at: [www.nationaldeafacademy.com](http://www.nationaldeafacademy.com). NDA is also pleased to announce that we have purchased the domain name: [www.nda.com](http://www.nda.com). Soon you will be able to access our site through either address.**

*continued from page 2*

## Unsung Heroes: Mental Health Technicians

### What Have We Found Out About MHTs

We have come to realize that the effectiveness of MHTs depends less on the knowledge they bring to us than on their willingness to learn; less on their formal training, than on their intelligence and intellectual curiosity. Perhaps the most important attribute of all is their positive attitude. Without our strong complement of MHTs, NDA would not have been able to achieve its national reputation in the field of Deafness for the service it provides patients and their families.

*by McCay Vernon, Ph.D*



*Dwight Collins, MHT Team Leader, is Deaf himself and NDA's Employee of the Year. Dwight is a former UCF football player and is currently playing semi-professionally for the Lake County Hornets.*

# 2005 ANNUAL CONFERENCE



## BEYOND THE BANDAGE:

### *Practical Approaches to Addressing Mental Health and Behavioral Issues in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Classroom.*

National Deaf Academy is proud to present its 2005 annual conference: BEYOND THE BANDAGE: *Practical Approaches to Addressing Mental Health and Behavioral Issues in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Classroom.* The conference will begin with an opening reception and ceremony on Wednesday March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Thursday and Friday, March 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, will contain concurrent educational sessions relating to Mental Health, Deafness and Educational issues. Parents, educators, social workers, therapist, interpreters, nurses, administrators and other individuals from across the country will gather at the world renowned Hilton at the WALT DISNEY WORLD® RESORT for this exciting educational opportunity. Pending finalization, CEU's will be offered for: Nurses, Interpreters, Social Workers and other professional disciplines.

## Speakers & Topics at the 2005 BEYOND THE BANDAGE Conference

### Diane Morton, Ph.D.

Keynote Presentation

### Alan Cohen, MD

Practical Use of Psychotropic Medications for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in the Classroom

### Ron Lybarger, Ph.D.

To Sign or Not and Sign Language: Cochlear Implants and Sign Language

### Silke Parl, Psy.D.

Assessing and Treating ADHD in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Population

### Angela Saunders, BA, NBCT

Educational Approaches and Techniques for Autistic Students

### Asiah Mason, Ph.D. and Michelle Smith, MA

Developing a Therapeutic Classroom for High Risk Deaf Students

### Gabriel Lomas, MA

Meeting the Counseling Needs of Deaf Students in Public Schools

### James E. Vanderbosch, Psy.D. and Christine Mayworm, M.A., L.C.P.C

The Psycho-Social Impact of Deafness on Child Development

### Keven Poore, MA, CASAC

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Chemical Dependency / Mental Health Issues

### Christopher Wagner, BS

Making Bold Moves: Advocacy and Deaf Children

### Tammy Weiner, Ph.D.

Perspectives on Bullying: Prevention & Intervention

### Irvine Stewart, MSW

Perspectives on Diversity

## March 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, 2005

### Wednesday, March 16<sup>th</sup>

6:00 to 8:00 Reception

### Thursday and Friday, March 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>

7:30 to 8:30 Registration and Breakfast

8:30 to 10:00 Concurrent Session

10:00 to 10:30 Break

10:30 to 12:00 Concurrent Session

12:00 to 1:30 Lunch

1:30 to 3:00 Concurrent Sessions

3:00 to 3:30 Break

3:30 to 5:00 Concurrent Session

### Location:

Hilton at the WALT DISNEY WORLD® RESORT  
1751 Hotel Plaza Blvd  
Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830  
407-827-4000

### Rates:

\$169/night  
Code: NDA

*Registration Form on page 6*



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Orlando, FL

**Don't Forget: The 2005 NDA Conference will be held in Orlando, Florida  
on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup>.**

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**BEYOND THE BANDAGE CONFERENCE REGISTRATION**

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Hilton in the WALT DISNEY WORLD® RESORT  
Wednesday, March 16th: 6:00pm to 9:00pm – Reception • Thursday & Friday, March 17th-18th: 8:00am to 5:30pm  
1751 Hotel Plaza Boulevard • Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830-2781 • Phone: 407-827-4000

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ ORGANIZATION: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

**REGISTRATION RATE: \$200.00 USD**

*American Express*  *Visa*  *Master Card*  *Discover* (Please indicate card type if credit card payment)

Checks should be made payable to: National Deaf Academy

CARD NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_ EXPIRATION DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME ON CARD: \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**SEND REGISTRATION AND PAYMENT TO:**  
Elena L. Moore, Conference Coordinator • c/o National Deaf Academy  
19650 US Highway 441 • Mt. Dora, FL 32757  
Phone: 352-735-9500 • Facsimile: 352-735-4939  
Email: Emoore@nationaldeafacademy.com