

EMBRACING THE ROLE OF FAMILY CARING

UNAFAM / THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF FAMILIES IN PSYCHIATRIC CARE AND PSYCHOSOCIAL REHABILITATION

Because no one should have to cope with a loved one's mental illness on their own

Valérie Broussolle, a recent retiree from the French National Education where she worked as a law professor and middle school principal, is deputy regional delegate in Grand Est. Her field of action is the representative of users, patients and families in psychiatric hospitals. As such, she leads a network of user representatives within UNAFAM Grand Est and represents the association in a group of user associations, France Assos santé.

PRESENTATION by Ms BROUSSOLLE Valérie

UNAFAM A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR THE BENEFIT OF FAMILIES OF LOVED ONES WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

As just presented by Mrs. Kempf, Unafam is a national association of families of relatives with mental disorders. Peer volunteers helping families are an essential link without which all our actions could not come to life.

I have been a member of Unafam for 12 years and a volunteer for 7 years. Why should I get involved in this association? Because at some point I needed support, to listen, when our son fell ill. Like many families, I knew nothing about mental illness and I didn't know what to do. I had the impression that the sky was falling on me and that life stopped.

FOCUS ON TRAINING WORKSHOP PROSPECT

My first meeting with Unafam was through a discussion group (support group) in which we participated with my husband. Participating in this group gave us hope and allowed us to deal with the disease. During one of the group's meeting, the volunteer coordinator introduced us to a training session called "l'atelier prospect".

Designed by the EUFAMI (European Federation of Associations of Families of People with Mental Illness) association and run by peers (relatives of people with mental illness), the Prospect program is aimed at anyone directly concerned by a loved one's illness. It helps to take a step back from the illness of the loved one, develop self-confidence and self-esteem, and identify methods for coping strategies.

Unlike other training sessions, no psychologist is present. It is led by two volunteers from UNAFAM, who are concerned about the illness of a loved one.

The prospect workshop, organized over 3 consecutive days including a weekend, is often the gateway to other training sessions. It is a moment of breathing for families who, through exchanges between peers, realize that they are not alone. It is a powerful moment to understand the disease and all its consequences on the social life of the family. It is a time of awareness that invites you to stop feeling guilty and to take time for yourself to better help your loved one.

"Personally, my husband and I attended this workshop shortly after the announcement of our son's illness. It allowed us to take a step back. to put into words certain behaviors and especially to say that it was possible to rebuild a life with the disease and that psychosocial rehabilitation was possible. It was a moment to breathe, to restore hope and look to the future more calmly, as well as fostering a sense of belonging to a group and no longer feeling alone in the face of mental illness). It has also helped alleviate feelings of guilt.

I would also like to point out that Mr. André Decraene participated with another Belgian member in a Prospect training course in Metz. These cross-border exchanges could be deepened or extended.

I would like to emphasize that all the training courses offered by UNAFAM are free and open to all families

FOCUS ON BREF THE PSYCHOEDUCATION PROGRAM FOR CARERS

The BREF program is a psychoeducation initiative aimed at the relatives of individuals suffering from mental disorders, which holds real and recognised importance in the recovery of these relatives.

Its objective is to explain the disease, its manifestations, and treatments, while providing concrete tools to improve communication, manage difficult situations, and support the affected person towards recovery.

This program fits perfectly into the concept of "family caring" as healthcare professionals participate in the sessions. As a result, families are finally taken into account for the support of their loved ones.

During the 3rd session, the interview takes place with a volunteer from Uanfam. This peer interview is highly appreciated by families. It is sometimes a gateway to volunteering. This is the case for the Bas-Rhin delegation where several people became volunteers after benefiting from the 3rd BREF interview in the presence of a family peer helper, a volunteer from Unafam.

Initiated by the Vinatier Hospital in Lyon, the training of trainers and volunteers was centralised.

However, for the past 2 years, given the importance of this program as an aid for patient recovery, the Ministry of Health has allowed its regional deployment by allocating a specific budget. By the end of 2026, the Grand Est region should benefit from its regional Bref training center. Located in Metz, within the Jury mental health establishment (EPSM), it will allow for the multiplication of sessions aimed at families. It should also enable the training of numerous volunteers to help even more families.

The opening of the regional training center Briefly, it represents a strong institutional recognition of Unafam's investment in families and its commitment to developing the therapeutic triad (care team).

DEMOCRACY IN HEALTH IN THE FRENCH HEALTH SYSTEM: REPRESENTATION OF USERS

A FEW WORDS ABOUT USER REPRESENTATION

Health democracy has gained momentum with the Kouchner law of March 4, 2020, relating to patients' rights and the quality of care. Indeed, since this law, a Users' Commission (CDU) has been established in every public or private healthcare facility.

Personally, at Unafam, I have been more specifically involved in representing users at mental health facilities, in the CDU.

In psychiatry, the relationships between families, patients, and care teams (including doctors) are far from fluid, simple, and calm, especially in the case of hospitalisation. Conflicts between carers and families are very frequent, as hospital psychiatrists often refuse to address the family.

The role of the RU is very important because it allows for insisting with the management to recognise the place of families and their importance in the recovery process of the person concerned.

RESPECT FOR PATIENT RIGHTS, THE FOUNDATION OF RU ACTION

Our role in defending the rights of patients in psychiatric facilities is all the more important as the therapeutic alliance is often undermined.

Moreover, restraint practices are still present and challenge the freedom of movement and dignity.

The RU are somewhat the sentinels of respecting users' rights, they act as a watchdog for the respect of patients' rights.