



For Information Contact:

Eve Herold, 703-907-8640

press@psych.org

Jaime Valora, 703-907-8562

jvalora@psych.org

Embargoed until:

March 1, 2010

Release No. 10-16

Community-Based Theater offers Potential for Promoting Individual Recovery and Community Integration

ARLINGTON, Va. (March 1, 2010) – Community-based theatre involving people with psychiatric disabilities offers much potential as a catalyst for personal recovery, growth, and social connection, as well as for societal change, according to the authors of an article in the March issue of *Psychiatric Services*, a journal of the American Psychiatric Association.

The article authors, David A. Faigin, M.A., and Catherine H. Stein, Ph.D., distinguish between what is commonly known as “community” or “amateur” theater and “community-based theatre,” which is a form of sociopolitical theater that functions from a social justice perspective and aims to raise awareness and promote discourse on social issues such as mental health, poverty, HIV or drug-use prevention, and domestic violence through original works.

The authors argue that this form of theater can not only promote individual self-esteem and empowerment, but can also help to challenge stereotypes about mental illness, reduce stigma, and provide valued social roles to individuals coping with mental illness. Attitudes toward people with mental illness are often shaped by negative portrayals in popular media. Theatrical performances involving people with psychiatric disabilities offer a more balanced and realistic portrait. Audience members have the opportunity to have personal contact with the actors and to view them in a valued social role, which can decrease stigmatizing attitudes.

Community-based theater initiatives take many forms. Some are focused on organizing and maintaining a troupe of actors and writers who remain together for several years. Others may be more time limited and culminate in a single performance for the local community. Based on a review of existing literature, the authors found several core components of theater programs that are of particular benefit to individuals living with mental illness, including processes of group cohesion and affiliation; common goals; common experiences; setting characteristics of openness and inclusion; opportunities for community connections and integration; flexibility; and ownership.

The authors suggest further research in a number of areas, including both quantitative and qualitative research on theater’s impact on individuals’ outcomes, such as sense of self, community integration, and quality of life, and the impact of the theater programs at the community level.

About the American Psychiatric Association:

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at www.psych.org and www.HealthyMinds.org.

###