



Dr. Donna McNelis, President of NADD, Visits SMC Area

Smoky Mountain Center hosted a training series on June 10 and 11 with special guest presenter Dr. Donna McNelis, President of The National Association for the Dually Diagnosed (NADD). NADD is an association established 30 years ago "to promote understanding of and services for individuals who have developmental disabilities and mental health needs" (Source: <http://thenadd.org/about-nadd/>). Nearly 100 people attended the memorable training event.

Dr. McNelis shared a wealth of knowledge about the co-existence of intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) and mental health (MH) disorders. McNelis, who is also the Director of Behavioral Healthcare Education at Drexel University College of Medicine, explained that both intellectual/developmental disabilities and mental health should be assessed and diagnosed when they occur simultaneously. She cautioned against "diagnostic overshadowing" in dual diagnosis, which happens when behaviors, moods and emotions are attributed to the individual's intellectual/developmental disability.

Dr. McNelis explained the genetics of Williams Syndrome, Fragile X and Prader-Willi, and surprised the audience with the fact that in 1994 there were 283 identified genetic causes of I/DD and in 2013, there are 1200+ identified genetic causes of I/DD. She shared hope that there are "cures" on the horizon for many of the identified causes.

With the recent release of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), McNelis clarified that the Roman numerals were eliminated from the title to allow numeric updates similar to those used for computer software updates (i.e. DSM 5.1, 5.2 etc.). She presented an overview of the new way the DSM-5 is organized and explained the Autism Spectrum changes at length. The audience's questions centered around the DSM-5 removal of Axis coding. McNelis spoke about the person centeredness of the DSM-5, cross-referenced the DSM-5 with the DM-ID (Diagnostic Manual - Intellectual Disability), and explained uses for assessment and diagnosis.

Dr. McNelis expressed the importance of data collection and presented the work of William Gardner, Ph.D. in Best Practice Formulation Approaches. The training ended with case studies and information on Interagency Strategies.

For additional information on NADD or the DM-ID, visit www.theNADD.org.



Dr. Donna McNelis,
President of NADD, with
Dr. Craig Martin, SMC
Chief Medical Officer