



Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance

GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY

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# DBSA Making Mental Health Matter. October, 2016

## Speaking Up

Zack Grienke is one of the best pitchers in the game of baseball. What many people don't know is that his career almost ended before it began. When Zack was drafted by the Kansas City Royals in 2002, they did not know he lived with depression and anxiety. As he climbed through the farm system, he hid his symptoms well.

In 2005, he finally got promoted to the majors. Working in the bullpen and as a spot starter, no one on the ball club noticed anything strange. Around the end of the season, Zack told his fellow players he was quitting the team without even giving a good reason why. The Royals were concerned about his behavior and advised Zack to have a meeting with the director of baseball operations, Hall of Famer George Brett.

With Brett's help, Zack was able to face his problems. The Royals then took an unprecedented step. They gave Zack medical leave without limit. Zack was told he could spend as much time working on wellness as he needed, and still keep his spot on the team.

During 2006, Zack participated in therapy sessions with a noted sports psychologist while working on his skills by pitching simulated games at the Royals spring training complex in Arizona. In February 2007, Zack told the club that, with continued sessions, he felt ready to return to work. When the club left spring training, Zack stayed behind and did catch up work. Mid-season, Zack told the club he was ready. He pitched several rehab games in the farm system and was reinstated in August, staying in the bullpen to get his rhythm back.

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In 2008, he made the starting rotation and pitched the entire season going 16-8 with an Earned Run Average of 4.55. In 2009, he pitched so well that he made the Major League All-Star Team and was awarded the Cy Young Award for best pitcher in the American League. Zack continued his career pitching for the Los Angeles Dodgers, and is currently a player with the Arizona Diamondbacks.

Zack's journey is both a story of personal advocacy and of demonstrated leadership, on the part of the management of the Kansas City Royals, to end discrimination in the workplace. However, the true lesson to be learned is that the Royals did not give up on Zack—something a lot of employers would have done.

His success underscores that, just because a person has a mental health condition they shouldn't be shunned.

## In the Know

When we think of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), most of us think that it only applies to pregnant women and new mothers. However, this is not the case. According to the Department of Labor, FMLA applies to employees who are "[unable to work because of a serious health condition](#)".

A serious health condition includes "a mental health condition that involves any period of incapacity or treatment connected with inpatient care (i.e., an overnight stay) in a hospital, hospice, or residential care facility" or "any period of incapacity (or treatment therefore) due to a chronic serious health condition."

FMLA applies to organizations that employ at least 50 employees. A health care provider must complete forms confirming the employee's medical condition, and, to qualify for benefits, an employee must have at least one year of employment with the organization and have worked 1,250 hours. Although FMLA is unpaid, the employees' job and health insurance are protected.

According to Alexander Wolf, an AT&T employee who lives with bipolar disorder, AT&T employees are trained about FMLA benefits and encouraged to use them. Wolf emphasizes that FMLA applies not only to the employee's health, but can also be used to care for a family member experiencing an illness. Another misconception is that FMLA must be used for large blocks of time. This is not true. FMLA can begin after three consecutive days.

"When my bipolar disorder flares up, usually in the spring, and I'm extremely irritable and manic, it's not wise for me to be at work," Alexander said. "My LCSW will have me stay home for 2-3 days and that's covered as a chronic condition."

To learn more about FMLA and eligibility benefits, visit the following [link](#). Remember, there is no shame in asking for medical leave. Good health is crucial for efficient work performance and a pleasant work environment.

## People Power

What does the phrase "mental health parity" mean? In short, it refers to a group of federal and state laws and regulations that work to ensure that the health insurance benefits you are entitled to for mental health care are "equal to" those provided for physical health issues. Developed over the past 20 years, these laws require that health insurance companies adhere to a variety of guidelines that address how parity is measured and provided. However, like any set of laws and regulations, there are loopholes and gaps. Key issues to consider when evaluating your health plan:

- Are you being provided comparable coverage?
- Are the rules for medical necessity the same for all medical conditions?
- How does the plan provide disclosure and transparency of its benefits?

Under the law, you have the right to submit an appeal if you are denied coverage for your care. This can be a challenging process but well worth the effort. First, contact your insurance provider and ask them to review your request. If you are not satisfied with their response, contact your state insurance commissioner or the federal Department of Labor, which have oversight over parity implementation, and ask them for assistance.

It is important that you know what benefits you are entitled to and what to do if you think you are being denied the coverage you need. Given the complexity of health insurance, this can be tough to determine. However, excellent resources exist to help guide you. The resources listed below can provide you with more background information and sample appeal letters:

- [Parity Track](#)
- [Parity Implementation Coalition](#)
- [Legal Action Center](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)
- [Department of Labor MHPAEA Fact Sheet](#)
- [Department of Labor —How To File A Claim For Your Benefits](#)
- [DOL Employee Benefits Security Administration Consumer Assistance: 866-444-3272](#)

One of the biggest challenges people face, however is finding a psychiatrist that is in-network or accepted by their insurance plan. For that reason, DBSA is asking people to share their experiences by [taking a short survey](#). By doing so, you will enable DBSA to use this information to fight for change.

### Victory Corner

If the name Jennifer Cornine sounds familiar, that’s because we first highlighted her effort to **stand up against stigma** in the [April newsletter](#). As that article highlighted, Jennifer made the decision to fight to retain her state teaching certificate after it came into jeopardy as a result of a mental health episode. Jennifer felt her case with the New Jersey Department of Education had been handled differently than another case before the board just one year earlier. Further, she believed that the difference in the handling of the two cases was related to stigma and discrimination towards the mental health condition she lives with. Jennifer was not alone in her fight: her superintendent stood behind her, even writing a letter to the Department of Education.

We are pleased to share with you that Jennifer Cornine has come out of her fight to **stand up against stigma** with a victory! The state Department of Education has made their final ruling on the matter, and that ruling favors Jennifer. After Jennifer once more offered testimony to the board, they reversed the decision to suspend her certification for three years, rendering this chapter in Jennifer’s life finally over.

Not only did Jennifer win in her case against the Department of Education, she has accomplished something even more important: she has modeled for the members of her community, the students in her school, and her own children what living in wellness can look like AND that it is possible!

Thank you, Jennifer, for leading by example.

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