



## Frances' Story



For the better part of 20 years, I was treated for chronic major depression. Unbeknownst to me and my treating physicians, however, the growing constellation of symptoms that I began to manifest and which increasingly proved difficult to manage, were all ultimately attributable to untreated subclinical hypothyroidism. As a long-time mental health patient, I was typically prescribed a cocktail of antidepressants and additional medications to counteract the debilitating side effects of the antidepressants that inevitably became a common occurrence. With each change in antidepressant and dosage increase, I was promised an alleviation of my symptoms, but time and again, I was deeply disappointed.

Fortunately, this cyclical and unproductive pursuit of finding the 'right' antidepressant came to a halt by an unexpected development in my health status. Approximately 6 years ago, a sudden gain in weight prompted my treating psychiatrist to question my thyroid function. Blood tests were ordered and I was subsequently prescribed a minimal untherapeutic dose of T4. Unfamiliar with thyroid dysfunction, I began to inform myself and sought the care of an endocrinologist. Much to my dismay, I quickly learned that I would have great difficulty in obtaining a proper diagnosis and effective treatment. An initial referral to an endocrinologist at a teaching hospital was very disappointing. Although I presented obvious signs & symptoms of hypothyroidism, with a 'normal' TSH blood test the label of 'chronic major depression' was conveniently used to explain my troubles.

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Desperate to get the help I needed, I embarked on a relentless search for an endocrinologist who would recognize and treat my condition, and came across Mary J. Shomon's website ([www.thyroid-info.com](http://www.thyroid-info.com)) and book ('Living Well With Hypothyroidism'). She is an American thyroid patient advocate who turned her personal thyroid diagnosis into a mission to inform and empower the public about thyroid disease. I am particularly grateful to the United States & International 'Thyroid Top Doctors Directory' that she maintains on her website. It proved to be useful on two separate occasions. On first review of the list approximately 4 years ago, I was able to locate a Toronto endocrinologist where I live, who was willing to treat me for hypothyroidism despite normal TSH blood tests. I referred to the list a second time, 2 years later, when I began to realize that I was not receiving much benefit from conventional thyroid treatment (i.e.,

synthetic T4) nor from the use of desiccated thyroid (i.e., T4, T3, T2, T1) that was prescribed by a second doctor I subsequently sought help from.

At this point in time, I was in a desperate state having been unsuccessful in weaning off a high dose of antidepressant and experiencing extreme and debilitating symptoms of anxiety, depression, fatigue, brain fog, PMS, gastrointestinal issues, not to mention thinning, dry hair and nails, dry skin and excessive acne. By chance, I came across a book at my local pharmacy entitled 'What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Hypothyroidism', authored by Dr. Kenneth Blanchard, an MIT, Princeton & Cornell educated endocrinologist with a Ph.D. in chemistry, who practices in Boston, Massachusetts. His book strongly resonated with me because it discusses the connection between hypothyroidism and depression, and his clinical experience with treating hypothyroid patients who have been heavily medicated with psychiatric drugs. A cross-reference to Mary Shomon's 'Thyroid Top



Doctors Directory' revealed that Dr. Blanchard is included in the list along with numerous positive feedback posted by his patients. This provided me with the impetus to contact his office and visit him on January 13, 2011. Since then, I have been regularly followed by Dr. Blanchard via teleconference calls and yearly visits to his Boston office.

Currently, I am no longer on antidepressants and am successfully managing my condition with the use of physiologic proportions of T3 and T4 - a hormone combination therapy developed by Dr. Blanchard that, while not considered a standard treatment protocol by a majority of endocrinologists, has proven to be very successful in his practice. In just under a year, with Dr. Blanchard's help, the constellation of symptoms that plagued me for far too long and presented a constant challenge for my various physicians to manage, have resolved themselves. Today, with my health restored, my focus is to put the pieces of my personal life and my professional legal career back in order. My struggle has been long and arduous, pervading ALL aspects of my life. For this reason, I have a passionate desire to share my story in hopes that others will identify with it

and benefit from the hard lessons that I learned along the way.

There is certainly a need to create awareness about subclinical hypothyroidism as it continues to be widely misunderstood and disregarded as a legitimate condition. I have no doubt that there are many like myself, who have been misdiagnosed with depression or other mental health condition, and are being unsuccessfully treated with psychiatric drugs, when the underlying cause of their medical issues is subclinical hypothyroidism. I also believe that, as I experienced, there are many who, diagnosed with hypothyroidism, are unable to achieve optimal health on conventional thyroid treatment and are led to believe that their unresolved symptoms are unrelated to their thyroid condition and/or are personal shortcomings that cannot be medically addressed. Unfortunately, achieving thyroid health presents two challenges – obtaining a proper diagnosis and receiving effective treatment – and my story is a testament to that reality.

**Frances G. Salvaggio, B.A., LL.B.**

### *Do you have a thyroid story?*

We would love to hear from you! Share your story of thyroid disease, help others who are going through a similar experience.



Send your story to: **[thyrobulletin@gmail.com](mailto:thyrobulletin@gmail.com)**

Or mail it to:

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