

Gruss aims to give hope to those with depression

Unique research organization will make appeal for support at a March 28 luncheon.

By **DAVID ROGERS**
Daily News Staff Writer

Since her arrival in Palm Beach more than 20 years ago, Audrey Gruss has played a leading role in dozens of benefits for local organizations. She has supported the Kravis Center, the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach and Hospice of Palm Beach County, among others.

Her latest project is more personal.

Nearly two years ago, Gruss, a former marketing executive and the wife of New York financier Martin Gruss, formed the Hope for Depression Research Foundation with funds



Butvay
Gruss' mother struggled with depression.

from the Audrey and Martin Gruss Foundation. She launched a public appeal for support of HDRF in November at an event in Manhattan.

The foundation's name is a nod to Gruss' mother, Hope Butvay. The former Stamford, Conn., resident died in Palm Beach at 82 during a visit with her daughter and son-in-law in late 2005. Butvay had lived with clinical depression for more than three decades.

The organization's mission is to identify the causes of depression and related disorders — bipolar disorder, ADHD and others — and identify potential cures.

The foundation can get funds to researchers at critical early stages and speed the process, Gruss said in an interview at her oceanfront home.

The foundation is different because it funds research that integrates psychology and neuroscience, she said.

With a logo designed, an advisory board of top psychiatric and neurologic experts established, 43 research grants worth more than \$5 million awarded and a Web site almost ready, Gruss is focusing her sights on gaining Palm Beach support for the foundation.

Fund-raiser scheduled

The foundation's first event in Palm Beach, a luncheon featuring author Dominick Dunne, actress Lorraine Bracco and New York anchorman Chuck Scarborough, is set for March 28 at The Mar-a-Lago Club.

Some 30 years ago, her mother's first emotional episode frightened and upset Gruss, her two sisters and their father, Vincent, a quality-control specialist for an airplane company.

"There were times when my mother became increasingly agitated. A simple thing would set her off," Gruss recalled. "I bought conditioner for my hair and she didn't understand why I did that. It was like an irrational anxiety or reaction.

"And on the other hand, she was very quiet and very subdued. My mother was not like that. She was wonderful and 'up.' She liked to sing and draw. She was a writer her whole life.



Daily News Photo by Jeffrey Langlois

Palm Beacher Audrey Gruss formed the Hope for Depression Research Foundation nearly two years ago after her mother, Hope Butvay, died at age 82 while visiting Gruss and her husband.

Hear Audrey Gruss explain the Hope for Depression Research Foundation at www.PalmBeachDailyNews.com.

Mother wasn't really a bipolar person. That was just her initial way of showing depression."

Butvay's doctors revealed little to the family.

"We were frustrated. We didn't know what mother had. We didn't know what to do," Gruss said.

She searched the country to find the appropriate diagnosis and treatment for her mother.

Butvay was prescribed about a dozen medications before a psychopharmacologist at Columbia University found the best combination of drugs to balance her mental state, Gruss said.

"So all the time we are watching, we are suffering with her," Gruss said. "And still today, the basic approach is trial-and-error. You take one medication, you see how it does. You take another medication, you see how it does."

Understanding the brain

The imprecise nature of diagnosis, the inadequacy of current treatments and a desire to speed the discovery process motivated Gruss to learn more about depression and create the foundation.

"In the last 20 years, since the introduction of the SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors), the Prozac-type medications, except for minor adjustments there has been no change in the basic treatment of depression," Gruss said. "I was stunned."

Mining both neuroscience and psychology for a cure is the right path to take, Gruss said.

"We will never understand the brain if we don't combine

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'I think it's really incredible that [Audrey Gruss] has an enormous commitment to finding a cure for depression and has just been able to build this foundation from the ground up so quickly.'

DR. HAROLD W. KOENIGSBERG,
Professor of psychiatry,
Mount Sinai School of
Medicine

GRUSS

All funds raised go to research

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the study” of the two fields, Gruss said. Doing so could help millions of people around the world who experience depression.

Exploring basic feelings and biology

Dr. Harold W. Koenigsberg, professor of psychiatry at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, is a member of the Hope for Depression board of directors.

The new foundation is able to pursue innovative research ideas more quickly than larger funding agencies, he said.

With the Gruss family foundation covering administrative costs, all funds raised go to research.

“The experience of depression involves an experience of what’s going on in the mind — their feelings of discouragement, of hopelessness, the experience of themselves as a person,” Koenigsberg said.

Those aspects haven’t been well connected with the biological studies and the role relationship stressors play in provoking depression, he said.

“It’s looking at how psychological factors like stress, bereavement, loss of

relationships and job stress, which trigger most depressions, induce changes in the biology of the brain,” Koenigsberg said. “And this can give us a pathway to new approaches to treating depression.”

The professor said Gruss has accomplished much in a short amount of time.

“I think it’s really incredible that she has an enormous commitment to finding a cure for depression and has just been able to build this foundation from the ground up so quickly and assemble such a talented group of scientific advisers,” Koenigsberg said.

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