The Hope for Depression Research Foundation held its inaugural luncheon to support HDRF’s pioneering research to find a cure for depression, with the help of some very special guests. Audrey Gruss, HDRF’s Founder and Chairman, with Luncheon Co-Chairs Catherine Adler, Jackie Drake, Lori Gendelman and Lis Waterman held the luncheon at the “Hope Pavilion” at The Mar-A-Lago Club.

After a brief cocktail reception, the 250 guests walked down a yellow carpet into a special tent created within the grand ballroom. This “Hope Pavilion”, all draped in yellow, felt like a room of sunshine and hope. News journalist Chuck Scarborough, winner of 31 Emmy Awards, was Master of Ceremonies and presented the staggering statistics of depression. He informed the guests that depression is the leading cause of disability among
15 to 44-year-olds, with a loss of 37 million disability days each year and an economic burden of $53 billion dollars annually.

Scarborough told the story of Joanne Murray, a writer whose depression was so severe that suicidal thoughts were constantly with her. She struggled for years, and her young daughter was the only thing that kept her going. He then revealed that this woman sought help for her depression, started writing her own name, and is now known to the world as J.K. Rowling, the famed "Harry Potter" author. "How close the world came to losing one of our most creative people" and "how many potential J.K. Rowings could we lose?" said Scarborough.

Scarborough introduced Audrey Gruss, who shared her personal story, describing how she and her family experienced her mother’s painful battle with depression for decades. Her mother Hope, who remained a talented writer and poet throughout her illness, experienced misdiagnosis, the trial and error of numerous medications, and finally found moderate relief before she passed away while visiting Palm Beach in 2005. Audrey Gruss, who has both donated and raised significant funds for many worthwhile causes, vowed that she would spend the rest of her life trying to find a cure for depression. She created HDF in her mother Hope’s honor, in April 2006.

Audrey Gruss explained HDF’s unique research approach, which is the first funded program to support the pioneering concept of neuropsychology — integrating the biology of the brain with the psychology of the mind. Dr. Peter Freed and Maggie Zellner, L.P., HDF Research Grant recipients, described their cutting-edge research projects and praised Audrey Gruss for her vision in creating this unparalleled foundation.

Dominick Dunne shared his struggle with depression and described his feelings of failure and even thoughts of suicide at times in his life. He told the group that one of his sons also struggled with depression and had finally sought help. This gifted writer’s story conveyed his main message, which was that the stigma of depression remains, and must be removed.

The luncheon closed with Audrey Gruss reading one of her mother’s poems to a standing ovation. The guests clearly saw the motivation behind this cause, particularly after seeing such public figures reveal their private stories to help others. Indeed the stigma of depression was much closer to being overcome through this moving event in Palm Beach. Numerous guests personally thanked Audrey Gruss, saying how grateful they were that HDF exists and that this was one of the most inspiring and special lunches to which they have been.

The mission of Hope for Depression Research Foundation (HDF) is to fund cutting-edge, international scientific research into the origins, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of depression and related disorders— anxiety, bipolar disorder, postpartum depression, post-traumatic stress syndrome and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) — with the ultimate goal of finding a cure. HDF sets itself apart by funding pioneering research that integrates the fields of neuroscience (the brain) and psychology (the mind).