

SHINING LIGHT

Part-time Palm Beacher and full-time philanthropist Audrey Gruss wants to bring awareness to a condition few discuss but from which many suffer. "Depression is a medical illness," Gruss says. "The difficulty is that you can see a broken leg, but you can't see when your mind has a break in it."

In 2006, Gruss founded the **Hope for Depression Research Foundation**, which funds scientific research into the causes, treatment, and prevention of depression. Above all, Gruss hopes to get people talking about depression, which affects more than 19 million Americans each year, according to Mental Health America.

Gruss' mission is a personal one. Her mother, Hope, dealt with clinical depression most of her adult life. "For decades, we saw my mother go through this psychic pain, and I felt so helpless," Gruss says. She created Hope for Depression to honor her mother's memory and to aid others in obtaining emotional and psychological well-being. "The irony is that her name was Hope, and that's what I think in the last eight years we've given to the field," Gruss says.

Besides awareness, Gruss believes the progress, or lack thereof, made in finding treatments is the biggest hurdle those with depression face. As she points out, medications have altered little in the past 30 years, leaving few options for those suffering from treatment-resistant depression. "I think the combination of talk therapy with newer, more personalized medication is what should be done in the future," she says. To that end, the foundation formed the Depression Task Force, a group of seven prominent neuroscientists who are working on a research plan that aims to create an animal model of depression to identify new forms of treatment. Though based at separate institutions in the United States and Canada, these scientists are sharing their results in real time, allowing for a rapid

THE DEPRESSION TASK FORCE COMPRISES NEUROSCIENTISTS WHO SHARE RESEARCH IN REAL TIME.

exchange of information. At two years into a three-year study, the task force has already identified three potential genes and three enzymes that might be targets for new treatments.

While the task force toils away, Gruss concerns herself with raising awareness. She hosts seminars in Palm Beach and New York as well as other philanthropic events like the Hope Designer Showcase at the Palm Beach Jewelry, Art, and Antique Show. These efforts are supported by the foundation's Arts Committee, an auxiliary group composed of members of the arts community. "Creative people are so sensitive in certain ways that they definitely have a higher incidence of depression," Gruss says. She describes her mother as wonderfully creative, with a love of writing, music, and dancing.

Whether accomplished through artists or scientists, the missions that propel Hope for Depression are vital to creating vibrant lives for those with depression. For Gruss, the foundation is no longer defined by her own experience with depression but by the millions of individuals her organization will help. "The emotional and psychological well-being of everyone is as important as the physical well-being," she says. "It's important to deal with the inside as well as the outside." (561-515-6454, hopefordepression.org)



AUDREY GRUSS