The Catatonia Foundation

No one's life should be lost to catatonia

The Catatonia Foundation: Insights and Impact

Advancing understanding, changing outcomes.

Remembering Dr. Max Fink (1923–2025)

It is with deep sadness that we share the passing of Dr. Max Fink on June 15, 2025, at the age of 102. He was more than a pioneer in psychiatry—he is the reason The Catatonia Foundation exists. His lifelong work on catatonia and electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) helped define the modern understanding of catatonia and its care, inspiring a generation of clinicians.

For those of us who founded this organization, Dr. Fink's influence was direct and deeply personal. When we reached out in moments of crisis, he phoned us personally. With extraordinary kindness and clarity, he helped us secure proper diagnosis and treatment, guiding us out of darkness, fear, confusion, and hopelessness. He personally helped three families who later came together to form The Catatonia Foundation; a fourth family was supported by one of his mentees. Our experience was not unique—whether you were a caregiver or a colleague, he was there to provide guidance and share his extensive knowledge and experience. His rare blend of compassion, expertise, dedication, and tenacity changed the course of our lives and many others'.

Across seven decades, Dr. Fink authored more than 800 publications and numerous influential books (including ***Catatonia: A Clinician's Guide to Diagnosis and Treatment***, ***Electroshock: Restoring the Mind***, and ***The Madness of Fear***), founded ***Convulsive Therapy*** (now ***The Journal of ECT***), and served as Professor of Psychiatry and Neurology at Stony Brook University, where he led research and teaching in psychopharmacology and ECT and mentored generations of clinicians. He co-authored the Bush–Francis Catatonia Rating Scale (BFCRS), helped establish the lorazepam verification ("challenge") test in clinical practice, and contributed to the APA Task Force on ECT and subsequent guidance on continuation/outpatient ECT—work that continues to shape daily standards of care. For a video about his life and work, watch here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_nCcUDl6is

Without his scholarship, mentorship, and advocacy, catatonia might still sit at the margins—treated as a subtype or historical curiosity rather than a distinct, treatable syndrome—and today's standards for diagnosis and treatment would simply not exist in the form we know.

We carry his legacy forward—in our advocacy, education, and research—so that every person with catatonia is recognized and treated, and no family has to face it alone.

What's New

Three new pages have been added to The Catatonia Foundation's website. A brief description of each is below—please check them out.

1) Catatonia in Autism and Other Neurodevelopmental Disorders
Comprehensive guidance on how catatonia affects autistic people and others with neurodevelopmental disorders—presentation, screening/documentation (including BFCRS), treatment, and practical tips for families and clinicians.
Read: https://www.thecatatoniafoundation.org/catatonia-in-autism

2) The Inside Scoop to Advocacy in Catatonia (video series)
Videos from an interview with Dr. Rachel Sieke on when, how, and why to advocate for a loved one experiencing catatonia—what to prepare, what to request, and how to partner with clinicians for timely, effective care.
Watch: https://www.thecatatoniafoundation.org/inside-scoop-to-advocacy-in-catatonia

3) Data Dictionary (Catatonia Datasets)
A collaborative project with Jonathan Rogers (Clinical lecturer, UCL Division of Psychiatry), who proposed the initiative and coordinated contributions from researchers worldwide. The Data Dictionary shows what catatonia datasets already exist and what variables they contain—built to accelerate research and improve the generalizability of findings.
Explore: https://www.thecatatoniafoundation.org/data-dictionary

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Our Commitment

The Catatonia Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to ending needless suffering and death from catatonia through:

- **Awareness and education** for medical professionals and the public
- **Advocacy and support** for patients, families, and caregivers
- **Research collaboration** to improve diagnosis and treatment

We update our materials as new knowledge emerges and collaborate globally with clinicians, researchers, and advocates to advance care and understanding.

Our goal is simple: no family should face catatonia alone, uninformed, or unheard—***and no one's life should be lost to catatonia.***

Ways to Support The Catatonia Foundation

Many families tell us: *“I don’t want anyone else to go through what we went through.”* That’s why The Catatonia Foundation exists—and why your support matters.

Ways to support The Catatonia Foundation:

- **Share your story** — your experience brings hope and spreads awareness
- **Spread the word** — tell others about catatonia and our resources
- **Volunteer your skills** — outreach, design, peer support, fundraising, nonprofit
- **Donate or fundraise** — your support sustains education, advocacy, and research. Click the button below to donate.

Donate

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