

Mental Notes

Newsletter of Mental Health America of Central Virginia, a United Way Partner Agency

Our mission is to promote mental health and eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness through advocacy, education, research and service for the residents of Central Virginia.

From the Program Director’s Desk.....

Maintaining Healthy Minds: New Resources for Older Adults

According to a report from the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry, depression among Americans over the age of 65 is an increasingly serious public health problem. It is common, debilitating, costly and potentially lethal. Late-life depression causes great personal suffering to those who have the disorder as well as to those who care about them. It increases medical morbidity, disability, and premature death, and is a leading cause of suicide among elderly people. Despite increasing attention, however, formidable obstacles continue to impede the appropriate detection, treatment, and prevention of late-life depression. What makes depression so insidious is that neither the sufferer nor the health care professional may recognize its symptoms in the context of the multiple physical problems of many elderly people.

Additional obstacles include time pressures, inclination of clinicians and patients to focus on acute physical problems, reimbursement limitations, and deficiencies in the integration of mental health systems and primary care. Depression causes untold misery to many who go undiagnosed and untreated. This is particularly tragic considering that, once diagnosed, depression in late life almost always can be treated successfully.

The impact of the current economy on the residents of Central Virginia is of great concern to organizations like Mental Health America that provide services to people in need of assistance. Particularly vulnerable are those adults aged 65 and older who represent a rapidly growing segment of the population and who, because of many age associated social and medical conditions, will be at risk for depression and other mental health disorders. Depression affects more than 19 million Americans every year, regardless of age, race, or gender. While depression is not a normal part of the aging process, there is a strong likelihood of occurrence when other physical health conditions are present. However, clinical depression is not a “normal” part of aging and is never a “normal” response; it is a serious medical illness that should be treated at any age.

Consider these facts:

- More than two million of the 34 million Americans age 65 and older suffer from some form of depression.
- Symptoms of clinical depression can be triggered by other chronic illnesses common in later life, such as Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, heart disease, cancer and arthritis.
- One-third of widows/widowers meet criteria for depression in the first month after the death of their spouse, and half of these individuals remain clinically depressed after one year.
- Older patients with symptoms of depression have roughly 50% higher healthcare costs than non-depressed seniors.
- Depression is a significant predictor of suicide in elderly Americans.
- Comprising only 13% of the U.S. population, individuals aged 65 and older account for 20% of all suicide deaths, with white males being particularly vulnerable.
- Suicide among white males aged 85 and older (65.3 deaths per 100,000 persons) is nearly six times the suicide rate (10.8 per 100,000) in the U.S.

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Can it be any clearer that early identification and treatment of depression in older adults is essential for maintaining healthy minds? It is the long-range vision for *Maintaining Health Minds* that mental health screening will become a routine part of health care just like blood pressure, weight, and cholesterol checks. That the stigma associated with mental illness and mental health treatment will be reduced or eliminated. That treatment will be accessible to all in need. And, that older adults and their families will have the knowledge and resources to manage and maintain their own mental health.

Remember...clinical depression is a very treatable illness. More than 80% of all people with depression can be successfully treated with medication, psychotherapy or a combination of both. For help finding treatment, support groups, and screening services, or to learn more about Maintaining Healthy Minds, please contact our office at (434) 847-9055. References for this article available on request.

Older Adult Attitudes Toward Depression

According to a Mental Health America survey on attitudes and beliefs about clinical depression:

- Approximately 68% of adults aged 65 and over know little or almost nothing about depression.
- Only 38% of adults aged 65 and over believe that depression is a “health” problem.
- If suffering from depression, older adults are more likely than any other group to “handle it themselves.” Only 42% would seek help from a health professional.
- Signs of depression are mentioned more frequently by people under age 64 than people aged 65 and over. These include “a change in eating habits” (29% vs. 15%), “a change in sleeping habits” (33% vs. 16%) and “sadness” (28% vs. 15%).
- About 58% of people aged 65 and older believe that it is “normal” for people to get depressed as they grow older.

EXERCISE YOUR MIND

Just as physical activity keeps your body strong, mental activity keeps your mind sharp and agile. One way to do this is to continually challenge yourself by learning new skills. If you continue to learn and challenge yourself, your brain continues to grow, literally. An active brain produces new connections between nerve cells that allow cells to communicate with one another. This helps your brain store and retrieve information more easily, no matter what your age.

How can you challenge yourself? Try:

- Learning to play a musical instrument
- Playing Scrabble or doing crossword puzzles
- Interacting with others
- Switching careers or starting a new one
- Starting a new hobby, such as crafts, painting, biking or bird-watching
- Learning a foreign language
- Volunteering
- Staying informed about what's going on in the world
- Reading



A mentally stimulating job, taking classes that interest you or even just reading more can help you maintain your memory longer as you age.



Mental Health and Aging

During the winter of 2010 our focus is on good mental health for older adults. We will send weekly e-blasts on signs of depression, how a mental crisis can affect overall health, early identification, prevention, and treatment.

CARING FOR AN AGING RELATIVE?

Are you a member of the “sandwich” generation who cares for a young child and one or more aging parents? Today, 44 percent of Americans between the ages of 45 and 55 have both living parents and children under 21 years old. In fact, 22 million Americans are caring for parents or older relatives, according to AARP. Nearly two-thirds of primary caregivers are women and most are working full or part-time. **Here are some tips on how to cope.**

LEARNING TO RECOGNIZE CLINICAL DEPRESSION

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

“Even though I had no energy and was always tired, I still had trouble sleeping. And the aches and pains! But my doctor said there was no reason he could find for them.”

“ I just couldn’t stop feeling sad and hopeless. I just didn’t enjoy the things I used to, like playing tennis, even being with my grandchildren. My life seemed so empty.”

These could be symptoms of depression.

Visit the MHACV website for Adult Services and Support Groups under Resources or call us (434) 847-9055.

- **Be organized.** Make lists, set realistic priorities and goals. Have back up plans.
- **Stay Healthy.** Sleep well, eat healthy, exercise, avoid unhealthy relationships.
- **Make time for yourself.** Do what you enjoy.
- **Ask for help.** You cannot, should not do EVERYTHING. If you have siblings and other relatives who can help, make them responsible as well.
- **Use Community Resources.** For example, adult day services, meal and shopping services, caregiver support groups.
- **Step Back.** When feeling stressed, angry, depressed, take time out.
- **Do not form unhealthy habits to cope.** Such as smoking or drinking heavily and drug use.
- **Inform your employer or supervisor.** Maybe you can compromise on schedules and deadlines.
- **Find your company’s policy on caregivers.** Benefits or services may be available. Take advantage of flextime or consider working part-time if economically possible.
- **Ask your Human Resources department** about the Family and Medical Leave Act. This allows for unpaid leave for family caregivers who meet certain requirements.
- **Acknowledgment.** Remember to thank your family, friends and co-workers for their help and consideration. *Copyright NMHA*

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

FEB 26-28

Centra presents Astraios

Music and Healing:

The Garden of Joys and Sorrows
Interactive Presentation and Concert

Featuring Chamber Music Works by Debussy, Beamish and Gubaidulina

February 26, 2010 Lynchburg College 7pm Presentation 8:30pm Concert

February 27, 2010 Randolph College 7pm Presentation 8:30pm Concert

February 28, 2010 Pearson Cancer Center 2pm Presentation 3:30pm Concert

All donations support the Centra Alan B. Pearson Regional Cancer Center Patient Support Fund.

For more information, visit www.astraiosmusic.org.

MARCH 1

Couples & Kids

FREE WORKSHOP for

Parenting Alone When You Aren't Single
Military Families
Incarcerated Parent (s)
Long-distance traveling from home to work

Monday, March 1, 2010

6 to 8 p.m.

Located in the TPS Building, 2nd Floor

110 Vista Centre Drive

Forest, VA 24551

To register, please call (434) 316-9339 today!
Spaces are limited. Childcare is not provided.

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There are three possible solutions for this, 51 and 15. 42 and 24. 60 and 6.

Going digital.....

Due to the increase costs of printing and postage, we now proudly offer our newsletter in an electronic format!

You can find our current newsletter and past editions on <http://www.mhacv.org/newsletters.htm>.

If you would like to receive it via email (instead of through post mail) simply email us at office@mhacv.org.

Thanks for helping us keep our costs down so that we may continue to use funds to provide services free of charge to the public!

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Please let us know if your contact information or that of any resource providers on our website needs updating.

Call (434) 847-9055.

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Contact information:
 Phone - (434) 847-9055
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