

Men's Health Network
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www.menshealthnetwork.org

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NIH News

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NIMH LAUNCHES FIRST PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION CAMPAIGN TO REACH MEN WITH DEPRESSION

Public service announcements feature real men with depression

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), one of the National Institutes of Health, today announced the launch of the first national campaign to raise awareness that depression is a major public health problem affecting an estimated 6 million men annually. Research suggests that men are less likely to seek treatment for this serious illness; data also show that men die by suicide at four times the rate of women.

The public health education campaign from the NIMH -- "Real Men. Real Depression." -- features the personal stories of men who live with depression: a firefighter, a national diving champion, a retired Air Force sergeant, a lawyer, a publisher, and a college student.

"For generations men have been told that they have to act tough," U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona said. "Today we're saying to men, it's okay to talk to someone about what you're thinking, or how you're feeling, or if you're hurting. We are attacking the stigma that tough guys can't seek help. They can and they should."

Research studies have found that depression affects twice as many women as men. However, research and clinical findings reveal that women and men may talk differently -- or in the case of men, not talk -- about the symptoms of depression.

Men may not recognize their irritability, sleep problems, loss of interest in work or hobbies, and withdrawal as signs of depression. This may result in fewer men recognizing their depression and asking for the help they need.

"This campaign is aimed at men. The hope here is to address men who have depression," said Dr. Thomas Insel, Director, NIMH. "Men who may not even recognize that depression is the problem or that much can be done to help them. Effective treatments are available and the success rate is very high -- more than 80 percent -- for people who seek help."

NIMH and documentary film producer Leslie Wiener developed a series of television, print and radio public service announcements (PSAs) featuring real people, not actors, telling their stories of how depression affected them.

The primary message of the PSAs is that it takes courage to ask for help. These men did and treatment for depression has helped them get back to their jobs, their families, and the activities they enjoyed before they began coping with the symptoms of depression. Patrick McCathern, First Sergeant, U.S. Air Force, Retired, is one of the men who got the help he needed to deal with his depression.

"I'd gotten to the point where I couldn't get out of bed. Nothing had meaning," McCathern said. "You have to deal with it; it just doesn't go away."

Depression is a serious medical condition that affects the body, mind and behavior. Depression can strike anyone regardless of age, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, or gender; symptoms of depression vary among individuals.

Instead of acknowledging their feelings, asking for help, or seeking appropriate treatment, men with depression may be more likely to turn to alcohol or drugs, or to become frustrated, discouraged, angry or irritable. Some men may throw themselves compulsively into their work or hobbies, attempting to hide their depression from themselves, family, and friends; other men may respond to depression by engaging in reckless behavior.

"This is an important area of research," said Dr. Dennis Charney, Chief, Mood and Anxiety Disorders Program, NIMH. "We need to understand how men respond to stress and symptoms associated with depression, and how to alert physicians to better recognize and treat depressive disorders in men."

"Men lead very complex lives, balancing many responsibilities," Dr. Insel said. "Depression can impair their ability to be successful."

Individuals and organizations are encouraged to call the campaign toll-free number (1-800-227-6464) and to access the NIMH Web site (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>) to learn more.

NIMH is one of the 27 components that make up NIH, the Federal Government's primary agency for biomedical and behavioral research. NIH is part of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Attachment: Symptoms of Depression
(http://www.nih.gov/news/pr/apr2003/nimh_SymDep01.doc)

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Symptoms of Depression

Depression comes in different forms, just as is the case with other illnesses such as heart disease. The three main depressive disorders are: major depressive disorder, dysthymic disorder (chronic, less severe depression), and bipolar disorder (manic-depressive illness: periods of depression cycle with periods of mania, which may include symptoms of excessive energy, abnormally elevated mood, unusual irritability, decreased need for sleep, increased talking, racing thoughts, increased sexual desire, grandiose ideas and activities, poor judgment, and inappropriate social behavior). Not everyone with a depressive disorder experiences every symptom. The number and severity of symptoms may vary among individuals and also over time.

Symptoms of depression include:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed, including sex
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Restlessness, irritability

Persistent physical symptoms, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain, which do not respond to routine treatment

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