



University of Michigan Depression Center

Winter 2003

PATIENT & FAMILY NEWSLETTER

Depression on Campus

On college campuses today, the problems associated with depression are increasing at an alarming rate. Fortunately, awareness has also increased. As a result, college counseling centers are seeing more students with depressive symptoms.

According to a University of Pittsburgh study, 85% of college counseling centers surveyed reported an increase in the number of students coming in with severe psychological problems including depression.

At Michigan, over 20% of the students seen at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) have depressive illnesses. According to Todd Sevig, PhD, CAPS Director, "Depression has been, is and will likely continue to be the most frequent issue here."

Why so much depression?

College is sometimes called "the age of depression." Why?

Research shows that the peak years for the onset of symptoms begin in the early teens and increase through the mid-20s.

Of the 19 million Americans who experience depression each year, many develop their first symptoms just before or during college.

Many students arrive at college already diagnosed with the illness—10% according to a 2000 study from the American College Health Association. However, in most cases, their depressive illnesses have not been diagnosed. So students are often puzzled and frightened by new symptoms.

Students with clinical depression generally function well in the college environment, but under times of great stress, they may experience a recurrence of symptoms.

rience a recurrence of symptoms.

This is complicated by the fact that some students with depression will go off their treatments when they arrive at college because they want to "fit in". Data reveal that this is a mistake, comparable to a diabetic discontinuing insulin.

Stress in college

College is a time of change and stress, which are risk factors for depression. Students must take on new responsibilities and they must learn how to independently navigate new environments.

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SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION MOST OFTEN SEEN IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

- Poor school performance
- Appetite changes
- Weight changes
- Low energy
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Trouble concentrating
- Trouble making decisions
- Low mood
- Irritability
- Suicidal thoughts
- Little interest in usual activities
- Headaches & digestive problems

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Depression Video and Resource Guide

Last October, over 500 students, faculty and staff attended the premiere of *The View From Here*, a documentary produced with support from the Rackham School of Graduate Studies.

Created to promote awareness about depression on the college campus, the video features students from differing identity groups, ages, and degree programs telling of their experiences with the disease. It also features faculty and staff who have worked with depressed students, and faculty and staff who have suffered from depression themselves. A resource guide containing detailed information about support and treatment services available at the University and in Ann Arbor accompanies the video.

For more information, or to obtain copies of the video and resource guide, contact Ernesto Mejia, divasst@umich.edu or phone (734) 615-1291. *The View from Here* can also be ordered online at www.dialogues.umich.edu.

The College Students and Depression Study (CSADS)

The primary objective of the CSADS study was to educate Resident Advisors — individuals who live and work with students—about depression, its signs and symptoms, how to recognize the symptoms in others, what to do if depression is detected, and how to access available resources.

Funded by the Depression Center, the study allowed researchers to train three groups of Resident Advisors (RAs) this past fall. A preliminary analysis of the data showed that the RAs experienced a significant increase in knowledge and positive attitudes about depression. The RAs will be revisited in several months to see if their knowledge and attitude changes are sustained and if successful referrals were made for students with depressive symptoms.

The researchers, professors Reg Williams and Bonnie Hagerty from the School of Nursing and Sarah Newlin from the Depression Center, hope that these positive results will stimulate additional financial support in order to expand this study and add this training program to the annual RA orientation schedule at the University of Michigan.

Mental Health Workgroup

For over a year, the directors of campus mental health sites for students have been meeting to better understand the current nature of mental health issues for students at Michigan. The group's work so far has focused on examining current care available for students, researching the mental health systems of other campuses, and talking with people from various academic units, administrative units, and with students. Ultimately, the group hopes to create a "web" of services so that students who want and need help are not left to struggle on their own. An interim report from the group is expected in the next few months, and we will report on it in this newsletter.

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Depression on Campus (Continued from page 1)

Students also feel social and academic pressure at a time when the support systems they have depended on at home are no longer as accessible. In addition, daily routines for sleeping, eating, exercising and drinking alcohol are drastically changed in college.

Finally, students often have financial worries. And all college students are expected to make important and difficult decisions about their futures after graduation. Collectively, these factors can create a tremendous amount of stress which contributes to the development of depression.

Consequences of depression

Untreated depression has many consequences for students. It often results in poor academic performance, alcohol and drug abuse, problems with relationships, and greater risk for other health problems.

Also, depression is often a chronic, episodic illness. A person who suffers from depression usually experiences repeated bouts. The

SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS

- Repetitive thoughts about life not being worth living
- Lack of interest in the future
- Withdrawal from activities and friends
- Increased substance use (drinking and drugs)
- Past suicide attempts
- Insomnia

Percentage of students in study who were experiencing depression

1988–1992	21%
1992–1996	35%
1996–2001	41%

Taken from a study conducted by researchers at Kansas State University who tracked student problems at its counseling center.

longer depression goes untreated, the more severe and frequent these episodes become.

And most importantly, depression is the number one risk factor for suicide. According to the National Mental Health Association, suicide is the second leading cause of death in college students.

Fortunately, it is possible to prevent these consequences. We know from research that early detection and treatment offer a greater chance for recovery. The earlier the treatment, the less likely depression will become chronic.

College campuses are ideal settings for promoting a preventive approach to depression. Although stigma continues to act as a barrier to seeking and continuing treatment, today's college students are better informed than past generations about depression, and they are generally much more open to talking about it with others.

In addition, health education

materials are readily available, and treatment can be free or much less expensive than treatment offered in other communities.

For more information on depression in college students, visit www.depressioncenter.org.

U-M hosts national conference on college-age depression

The Depression Center and the Rackham School of Graduate Studies are co-sponsoring the first annual national conference on "Depression on College Campuses". The conference will be held on the U-M campus on March 6 and 7.

Keynote speakers, scientific presenters, workshops, discussion groups, and videos will review the scope and consequences of the problem, discuss best practices in student mental health, identify barriers to implementation of those practices, seek to formulate public policy interventions to overcome the barriers, and catalyze a coordinated, comprehensive approach to student mental health care.

For more information, contact Sarah Newlin at (734) 763-7495 or email snewlin@umich.edu. Or, contact Lynne Dumas at (734) 647-2644 or ledumas@rackham.umich.edu. The conference website address is <http://www.rackham.umich.edu/DepressionConf>.

What can you do to help others ?

Depression is not an uncommon illness.
Education and early intervention are the keys.

Educate yourself and others, especially about the symptoms of depression.

Speak out against the stigma of depression, and help convey the message that depression is a common, treatable illness.

Use the proper terminology when discussing depression.

Calling it by other names just perpetuates the stigma.

If you are worried about someone you know, express your concern and offer to accompany that person to his or her first appointment.

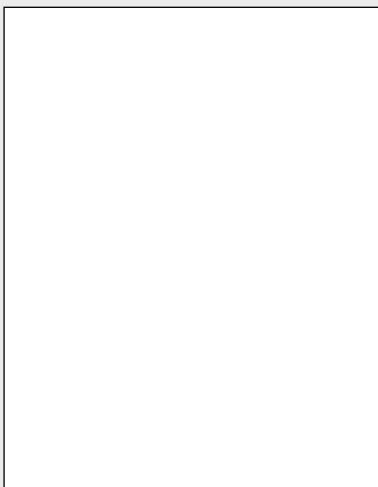
To learn more
If you would like to learn more about depression, or specifically

about depression among college students, visit the Depression Center website at www.depressioncenter.org.

You may also visit the FRIENDS Depression Education and Resource Centers located at 900 Wall Street in Ann Arbor and at 3892 Taubman in the U-M Hospital. The Centers offer helpful books, brochures and fact sheets at no charge. For walk-in hours, visit the Depression Center's website at www.depressioncenter.org.

To learn more about the U-M Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), you may visit their website at www.umich.edu/~caps. CAPS is located in the Michigan Union, in Room 3100. Hours are 8 am to 5 pm.

Depression and Smoking on Campus



An interview with Cynthia S. Pomerleau, Ph.D.

College is a stressful time full of new demands and many adjustments. In a study currently in press, Dr. Pomerleau and her colleagues at U-M and EMU explored whether smoking initiation in college women was related to depression. The results showed that women who started smoking in college were more likely to show a pattern of increasing depression during their freshman year than women who did not start smoking. To Dr. Pomerleau, this was no surprise since substance use in general is higher among people who are depressed and may represent an attempt to self-medicate. For students, this behavior also may result from the desire to fit in. The study raises the possibility that screening for depression in college may have an important additional benefit: It may prevent some students from taking up smoking—a dangerous habit that is tough to quit.



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