

## **Dealing With Depression**

**by Jim Kendall, LCSW**

More than 17 million Americans suffer from depression annually according to the National Institute on Mental Health. More than 80% of those suffering from depression can be treated successfully.

Although depression is common, many people do not receive treatment for their illness because they do not recognize the symptoms that may include:

- Depressed mood or feelings of prolonged sadness
- Sleep disturbance
- Appetite problems
- Fatigue/loss of energy
- Loss of interest in formerly pleasurable activities
- Irritability or increased anger (especially in men)
- Cognitive changes (decreased concentration or memory)
- Increased anxiety
- Generally feeling poorly/somatic problems
- Suicidal thoughts

The label of depression as a mental health issue carries a stigma for some who still think of depression as a personal weakness instead of recognizing it as a bio-psycho-social illness. Although treatment is readily available, medical problems, drug interactions, and difficulty tolerating the side effects of certain older medications often complicate it. "Newer advances in medications for the treatment of depression are much better tolerated," notes Paul Ragan, MD, psychiatrist for the Faculty and Physician Wellness component of the Work/Life Connections-EAP at Vanderbilt.

"It is sad that depression may go unrecognized", notes Ellen Trice, LEAP, CEAP, MSSW, Clinical Manager for the Vanderbilt Work/Life Connections-EAP, "Untreated depression can lead some to turn to suicide as the only way they can see to solve the problem. Depression can distort reality for that person causing them to forget about their importance to friends and family."

"Often a reduction in cognitive abilities such as concentration and memory is experienced before other symptoms are noticed. Losses and changes in one's life can trigger symptoms of depression, which can be reversed with proper treatment. People may be suffering needlessly," adds Trice. "Your doctor, clergy, or a therapist may be able to evaluate this and suggest a course of treatment. If you start to think about suicide, that's a cue to seek help immediately."

If you are a member of the faculty or staff at Vanderbilt University/Medical Center or don't know where else to turn, call the Work/Life Connections-EAP at (615) 936-1327.

**Help begins with a phone call!**