



# Mental Health Comprehensive Services

Providing Family Stability and Developing Life Coping Skills

## Depression in Older Adults

### What role does depression play?

Depression, one of the conditions most commonly associated with suicide in older adults, is a widely under-recognized and undertreated medical illness. Studies show that many older adults who die by suicide — up to 75 percent — visited a physician within a month before death. These findings point to the urgency of improving detection and treatment of depression to reduce suicide risk among older adults.

- The risk of depression in the elderly increases with other illnesses and when ability to function becomes limited. Estimates of major depression in older people living in the community range from less than 1 percent to about 5 percent, but rises to 13.5 percent in those who require home healthcare and to 11.5 percent in elderly hospital patients.
- An estimated 5 million have depressive symptoms that fall short of meeting the full diagnostic criteria for a disorder.
- This type of depression is especially common among older persons and is associated with an increased risk of developing major depression.

### Isn't depression just part of aging?

Depressive disorder is not a normal part of aging. Emotional experiences of sadness, grief, response to loss, and temporary “blue” moods are normal. Persistent depression that interferes significantly with ability to function is not. Health professionals may mistakenly think that persistent depression is an acceptable response to other serious illnesses and the social and financial hardships that often accompany aging - an attitude often shared by older people themselves. This contributes to low rates of diagnosis and treatment in older adults.

Depression can and should be treated when it occurs at the same time as other medical illnesses. Untreated depression can delay recovery or worsen the outcome of these other illnesses.

### Ask yourself if you feel:

- nervous
- empty
- worthless
- that you don't enjoy things you used to
- restless
- irritable
- unloved
- that life isn't worth living
- sleeping more or less than usual
- eating more or less than usual

Other symptoms that may signal depression, but may also be signs of other serious illnesses, should be checked by a doctor, whatever the cause. They include being very tired and sluggish, frequent headaches, frequent stomachaches, chronic pain. Most of these symptoms are treatable. To speak with a therapist about treatment, call Mental Health Comprehensive Services for your confidential evaluation at 404-786-4167.

For more information about this article on Depression in Older Persons, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/older-adults-depression-and-suicide-facts.shtml#how-common>