

There is help for depression

By Mary Meaux

Port Arthur News

December 28, 2005

For those out there let me tell you, depression ain't no picnic. And for family members of people with depression, I imagine it's pretty much like a roller coaster ride from hell.

I once met a sweet older woman who always seemed upbeat; she's a cancer survivor, has had loved ones deathly ill and endured some tough life events; but there's that smile and always, always a joke or funny story. Looking at her situation you'd think that she might have had some down time herself. I guess not.

One day I asked her how she stayed in such a good mood and told her about the bout of depression I was facing. Undoubtedly she did not quite understand what I meant because she said, ever so sweetly and with an expression of surprise, "but you write such good stories."

In any given 1-year period, about 18.8 million American adults suffer from a depressive illness, according to the National Institute of Mental Health Web site. One of the main things I've had to realize is that a depressive disorder is not the same as a "passing blue mood" and "it is not a sign of personal weakness that can be willed or wished away." NIMH also explains that people with depressive illness cannot merely pull themselves together and get better.

Thank God for NIMH's explanation. Before I sought help I thought it was just me, you know, PMS, changing mood patterns, those sorts of things. Then I surfed the Internet and cried for joy when I found out that the depressive feelings do not mean I am weak. I can now believe that I am basically a good person.

Imagine, if you will, that feeling you would get if you're a kid and you're called to the principal's office or an adult, and you are called into the boss's office; that feeling of dread, impending doom. "What's going to happen to me? What did I do wrong?"

Now imagine the feeling popping up unexpectedly. You're having a good day, the sun is shining, the bills are paid, your life is great and you are happy. Then wham! The bad feeling is back.

I've been under the care of a mental health specialist for close to a year now and it has helped greatly. Sure I still have some down times, like at the holidays, a time when I miss my parents and remember back to stressful times in my life, but basically I'm OK. I only wish I had sought help sooner.

I joke about taking my nightly medication and have no problem telling others that yes, I've been diagnosed with depression and it's OK. Maybe by talking about the disorder I can help someone else seek the help they need.

Symptoms of depression (Courtesy of NIMH)

- 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 loss or overeating and weight gain
- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- Restlessness, irritability
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain.

Please, please, please, if you or someone you love are experiencing symptoms of depression, seek professional help. It's not a sign of weakness and there is no longer any stigma associated with receiving mental help. It could save a life.

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