



spotlight on health

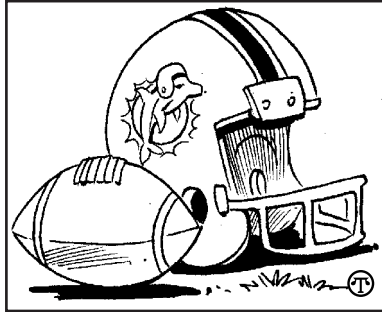
Football Hero Tackles His Toughest Opponent—Social Anxiety Disorder

(NAPSA)—Many people know Ricky Williams as the Heisman trophy winning running back that had it all—fame, money and talent. Selected as the number one draft pick out of college, Ricky created a media frenzy, making him a celebrity overnight. With a successful career underway, who would believe that this football sensation who plays for crowds of 100,000 dreaded the thought of going to the grocery store or meeting a fan on the street?

“I was twenty-three, a millionaire and had everything, yet I was never more unhappy in my life,” said Ricky Williams. “I felt extremely isolated from my friends and family because I couldn’t explain to them what I was feeling. I had no idea what was wrong with me.”

Ricky’s fears escalated at the start of his professional football career in New Orleans. With high expectations to perform, Ricky was thrust in the limelight. Often portrayed as aloof or even weird in the media—he was known for conducting interviews with his helmet on and shying away from fans. He could barely interact with his young daughter or leave his house to do errands. What most didn’t realize is that by simply talking to a reporter, a fan, a member of the community or even his own family, Ricky was struggling with the very root of his problem.

Ricky later learned he was among the more than 10 million Americans who suffered from social anxiety disorder, the third most common psychiatric disorder after



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depression and alcoholism. People with social anxiety disorder have an intense fear of being scrutinized by other people in social or performance situations and of negative evaluations. In short, they are literally “afraid of people.” Even worse, only five percent of people with social anxiety disorder actually receive treatment.

Fortunately for Ricky, a good friend suggested that he go see a therapist.

“When I first met Ricky, he could hardly look me in the eye,” said Janey Barnes, the therapist who diagnosed him with social anxiety and started his treatment program. “Like most people with this condition, Ricky thought he was just shy or strange, but it was clear to me that his anxiety was debilitating, which is very different than shyness. Luckily, social anxiety disorder is highly treatable.”

After his first therapy session, Ricky began his road to recovery.

“After I was diagnosed with social anxiety disorder, I felt

immense relief because it meant that there was a name for my suffering. I wasn’t crazy or weird, like I thought for so many years,” said Williams. “As part of my treatment program, my physician prescribed the antidepressant Paxil, in combination with therapy. Soon thereafter I was able to start acting like the real Ricky Williams.”

It’s been a little over a year since Ricky Williams was diagnosed and treated. In that year, Ricky has made dramatic improvements. Today, he doesn’t even think about doing an interview with his helmet on, he’s going to the mall for the first time in three years and is able to be a better father to his children.

“I understand that a lot of people, especially men, look up to me because of my profession, so I have a chance to reach out to people and let them know what I’ve been through and how treatment has made my life so much better,” added Williams. “If my story can help even one person seek help, it will feel as though I’ve scored the game-winning touchdown.”

Most recently, Ricky was traded to the Miami Dolphins where expectations for him are very high. Starting over with a new team, in a new place and with new fans is a lot for anyone to handle, let alone someone who suffers from social anxiety disorder. But Ricky welcomes this chance to make a fresh start *on* and *off* the field. He knows he will likely face many of the same pressures as before, only this time he is better equipped to meet the challenge.

Note: Paxil is generally well tolerated. Most common adverse events (incidence of 5 percent or greater and incidence for Paxil at least twice that for placebo) in social anxiety disorder studies include sweating, nausea, dry mouth, constipation, decreased appetite, somnolence, libido decreased, tremor, yawn, abnormal ejaculation, female genital disorders and impotence. Patients should not be abruptly discontinued from antidepressant medication, including Paxil. Concomitant use of Paxil in patients taking monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) or thioridazine is contraindicated.