



HEALTH AWARENESS

Dealing With Depression: A Serious Medical Condition

(NAPSA)—Many people may be surprised to learn a few facts about the medical condition known as depression. This disorder causes sadness that interferes with daily life. It is a medical condition, not a normal reaction to such life situations as the death of a loved one or the loss of a job.

“People with depression may not realize that their feelings could be due to a medical condition,” said Amir Qaseem, M.D., of the American College of Physicians (ACP). “A loss of interest in daily activities, decreased ability to think or concentrate, lack of energy or change in weight or sleeping patterns could be signs of depression. If people experience these symptoms for more than a few weeks, they should talk to their doctor.”

Any stressful situation, such as a financial or economic crisis, may trigger a depressive episode. Depression may be more prevalent during the late fall or winter months when a reduced amount of natural sunlight can trigger seasonal affective disorder (SAD). During these months, some people may also experience deep sadness, dread or loneliness due to the holiday season.

Options to manage depression include drug therapy, counseling or both. If drug therapy is prescribed, so-called “second-generation” drugs are often used because they are effective and have fewer side effects than older, “first-generation” drugs.

A guideline recently released by ACP found no substantial differences in effectiveness or quality of life among second-generation antidepressants.

“Second-generation drugs have different adverse effects but are equally effective for treating depression,” said Dr. Qaseem.



Depression is a medical condition that can be treated with drug therapy, counseling or both.

“Doctors should make treatment decisions based on side effects, cost and patient preferences and make necessary changes in therapy if the response is not sufficient after six to eight weeks. Doctors should also assess patient status and adverse effects on a regular basis starting within one to two weeks of starting the treatment.”

Adverse effects can range from mild, such as constipation or diarrhea, to severe, such as suicidal thoughts. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration advises that all patients receiving antidepressants should be closely monitored on a regular basis for increases in suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Drug treatment should continue for four to nine months after a satisfactory response in patients with a first episode of depression. For patients who have had two or more episodes, an even longer duration of therapy may be beneficial to prevent relapse or recurrence.

ACP (www.acponline.org), the nation's largest medical specialty society, is an organization of more than 126,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists and medical students.