

Health Awareness

Seniors' Mental Health Problems Often Go Unnoticed

(NAPSA)—Millions of older adults have a diagnosable mental health problem, but only a quarter of them get any type of mental health attention at all, and far fewer receive appropriate treatment.

Older adults commit suicide at a higher rate than any other age group. "This alarming statistic shows the need to better understand clinical depression and mental illness among the elderly," says Laurie Young, PhD., Executive Director of OWL (Older Women's League).

To help the public, physicians and older adults better understand mental illness, OWL, along with the American Psychological Foundation and other organizations, is promoting public education to end barriers to diagnosis and treatment. A few of the important things to know about mental health and aging include:

- **Depression is not a normal part of aging.** People expect older adults to be depressed or disoriented because of their age, their changing roles, or their loss of family and friends. The truth is that clinical depression is different than grief over losses, and older adults with depression can be helped through counseling and medication. Research from the National Institute of Mental Health shows that 80 percent of older adults recover from depression after receiving appropriate treatment.

- **Mental illness can suddenly appear later in life.** Many older adults become vulnerable to depression and other mental illnesses in connection with the



Older Americans often don't get all the mental health care they need.

onset of physical ailments. Stroke, Parkinson's, cancer, arthritis, diabetes and Alzheimer's can all cause or contribute to symptoms of clinical depression.

- **Undiagnosed and untreated mental illness has serious consequences.** Older adults who live with mental illness are more likely to have physical problems and stay sick longer. People with depression, for example, are more likely to have heart problems and need nursing care early.

- **Older adults need special services.** Research shows that the sooner older adults get proper diagnosis and treatment the better their long-term health will be. "Mentally healthy adults can continue to enjoy life, learn and grow," says Young. "Older adults need help from people who understand their specific needs and issues."

For a checklist of questions to ask your doctor and for more information about older adults and mental health, visit www.owl-national.org or call 1-800-825-3695.