

Understanding depression

Children and teens can be treated successfully



Gregory P. Caesar, M.D.,
Medical Director,
SLV Mental Health Center

The Food and Drug Administration recently required revised labels on antidepressants prescribed for children and adolescents. This information has frightened many young people and their families who worry that treating depression with medications is too dangerous. So **what do you do for young people with clinical depression who need medicine to get better?**

First, let's talk about depression itself. Depression is a serious condition that affects many people of all ages. It interferes with one's ability to work, go to school, enjoy their family, and lead a satisfied or productive life. Depression is under-recognized in our society, and people with depression often do not get appropriate treatment. "Depression itself can be potentially fatal. Suicide sometimes happens when a client is getting good treatment, but it is much more likely when a depressed client is untreated or gets ineffective treatment," said Medical Director Gregory P. Caesar, M.D.

"As a psychiatrist, I am concerned that depression could be diagnosed or treated even less often if we become too afraid of the medications we use to treat it. I believe the fear about antidepressant medicines is exaggerated. When assessment and treatment is done appropriately, using medications to assist in recovery is safe."

Dr. Caesar thinks some of these fears are now emerging because

antidepressant drugs are too often prescribed without a good assessment and with little follow-up. If antidepressants are prescribed to people who shouldn't be taking them in the first place, or if they get the wrong medicine or the wrong dose for their symptoms, we have more problems, he said. **"The first step is to get an accurate assessment.** If the assessment shows *major depressive disorder*, medications are usually appropriate and helpful. Sometimes we also use antidepressants to help with anxiety and irritability, symptoms closely related to depression, but anti-depressant medications may not be appropriate for other problems."

At the SLV Mental Health Center, a full assessment is done of the young person's symptoms, and several types of treatments should help. Dr. Caesar adds, "When medications are needed, we choose one that has been proven to work for the symptoms the client has. We instruct the client to call us right away if they experience any troubling effects from the medication. We also want to monitor the client closely by having the client in regular therapy and checking often that the medication is helping and not making things worse." According to the medical director, if the child or teen gets worse, an adjustment or change to the medicine might be necessary. The client might need to be seen more often or another type of treatment might be prescribed such as hospitalization, if appropriate. "Above all, we want to help young people stay safe and recover from their illness."

"The main point I want parents to know is that clinical depression is a very treatable illness." Dr. Caesar says, don't be afraid of treatment. Whenever a young person is suffering from clinical depression, parents, friends and teachers should be concerned about the condition getting worse, whether the person is taking medicine or not. **He says, "Anyone who takes anti-depressants should know that in order for the medicine to work, they have to be taken everyday.** If you take them irregularly, it's usually worse than not taking them at all. Taking the medication just off and on causes you to have ups and downs in brain chemicals that can do more harm than good."

No one anti-depressant fits all situations. With the modern medications, many options are available, and a trained medical doctor is the best person to decide which one to use in a given case. **One of the nice features of the newer medications is that they are unlikely to cause death even when someone takes an overdose,** according to Dr. Caesar.

For more help, or literature and informative websites, please contact the Mental Health Center at 589-3671.

The main point I want parents to know is that clinical depression is a very treatable illness.
