

## **Diagnosing Depression: Ask Two Simple Questions**

In a span of 30 years, depression has gone from one of the least to one of the most understood mental health issues. Today, it is well understood and very treatable. Unfortunately, despite effective treatment options, depression rates continue to escalate in every part of the world. The World Health Organization recently rated depression the fourth leading cause of human suffering; behind heart attack, cancer, and traffic accidents. Adolescents are the fastest growing age group of depression sufferers. Depression is most prevalent in the 25-45 age range. Because a stigma remains regarding seeking mental health services, 75% of individuals who suffer from depression, go undiagnosed and suffer needlessly.

A large number of depression sufferers show up in their physician's office complaining of a vast array of symptoms, ranging from fatigue and difficulty with concentration to numerous physical aches and pains, insomnia, and/or emotional stress. It is easy for mild to moderate depression to go undiagnosed until it progresses into a major depressive episode.

Fortunately, clinical research indicates that mild to moderate levels of depression can be quickly and accurately diagnosed by asking two simple questions. I encourage every physician and mental health provider to make these two questions a part of their standard intake interview. These two questions are:

- 1) Have you been feeling down, blue, or sad for one month or more?
- 2) Have you stopped or lost interest over the last month in things that bring you enjoyment and pleasure?

These two questions have been shown to correlate highly ( $r=.90$ ) with the Beck Depression Inventory; a widely used and very reliable instrument for diagnosing unipolar depression. A "yes" response to both of these questions is a strong indication of depression and suggests that the client will benefit from cognitive behavioral therapy (see my Feb. 24th blog--Change your mind, change your mood...for a description of cognitive behavioral therapy).

While a psychological evaluation can provide valuable and in-depth information regarding memory and cognitive functions, personality dynamics, and learning disabilities, such assessment is not necessary for a diagnosis of mild to moderate depression. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that cognitive behavioral therapy has been shown to be more effective than anti-depressant medications in the treatment of mild to moderate depression.

Not all mental health issues are as easily diagnosed and effectively treated as unipolar depression. If you are a mental health professional, I encourage you to incorporate these two questions into your assessment process. If you are a reader, who has answered "yes" to the above questions, I encourage you to be proactive and schedule a mental health consult. Three-fourths of depression sufferers go untreated and suffer needlessly--don't be one of them!