

CONGREGATIONAL DEPRESSION AWARENESS PROGRAM

Depression is now recognized as a significant public health concern, with more than 10 percent of American adults experiencing a major depressive episode each year and more than 20 percent experiencing at least one episode over their lifetime. Furthermore, depression is the major risk factor for suicide, one of the leading causes of death in the United States.

While it is clear that depression is a painful and potentially lethal illness, there is good news about depression that needs to be shared – that it is a highly treatable condition. Most individuals can be successfully treated for depression. However, far too many people who suffer from depression fail to receive effective treatments. Often this failure to be treated is because of one or more of the following obstacles:

- Failure to recognize the symptoms of depression
- Stigma attached to depression and other mental illnesses
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness; failure to understand that there are treatments
- Difficulty identifying and accessing mental health services

We are pleased to announce that the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine will be addressing these challenges by offering the Congregational Depression Awareness Program. The purpose of this program is to disseminate valuable information about depression to individuals directly and indirectly impacted by depression. We are currently seeking volunteers from local religious congregations who are interested in coordinating depression awareness and support programs in their congregations. Volunteers will receive instruction, resources, and ongoing support on the following topics:

- Recognizing the signs and symptoms of depression
- Strategies to overcome the stigma associated with depression and other mental illnesses
- Medical and psychosocial treatments for depression
- Assisting individuals who need help identifying and accessing mental health services
- Providing informal (i.e., non-professional) support to complement the professional care individuals suffering from depression are receiving
- Providing guidance and support for individuals who have a loved one suffering from depression
- Recognizing and responding to suicide warning signs
- Local and national resources (e.g., National Alliance on Mental Illness, Mental Health America, Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention)

Participants will be equipped to:

- Coordinate congregational/organizational/community education programs, providing:
 - Brief announcements
 - Bulletin inserts and handouts
 - Video messages
- Utilizing CDAP videos and printed materials, lead a 60-minute class on depression for individuals interested in learning more about:
 - Recognizing the signs and symptoms of depression
 - Understanding the treatments for depression
 - Supporting individuals directly and indirectly affected by depression
- Provide one-to-one support for individuals who are waiting to receive professional care or who have begun professional treatment but have not yet experienced the full therapeutic benefit of the treatment (medical and psychological treatments can take four to eight weeks to have a significant therapeutic impact). This can include:
 - Phone support
 - Face-to-face support

Individuals interested in participating in the Congregational Depression Awareness Program will need to:

- Complete an application explaining their interest and the strengths they would bring to the program (e.g., experience leading or coordinating other congregational ministries or programs)
- Receive the endorsement and a pledge of support for the program from their congregational leader
- Commit to attending five two-hour training sessions
- Commit to coordinating two congregation-wide educational programs on depression (e.g., sharing informational materials at worship services or other congregational gatherings). These could be tied to national observances such as Mental Health Awareness Month (May) and Depression Awareness Month (October).
- Commit to attending at least two follow-up classes and helping with evaluation of the program