The Nation's Voice on Mental Illness

Access to Antidepressants: *Saving Lives, Bringing Hope*

Antidepressants treat serious mental illness

Antidepressants are used to treat an array of mental illnesses, including depressive, bipolar, and anxiety disorders, that have serious impacts on people's lives. Without adequate access to a wide array of medication options, people who live with serious mental illnesses may not get the treatment they need to live and work in their communities.

Depressive, bipolar, and anxiety disorders affect millions

- **Major depression affects about 6.7 percent of adults** age 18 and older in a given year, or about 14.8 million Americans. **Bipolar disorder affects about 2.6 percent of adults**, or 5.7 million Americans. **Anxiety disorders affect about 18.1 percent of adults**, or 40 million. Anxiety disorders frequently co-occur with depressive disorders.[i]

Depressive disorders have profound impacts on health and productivity

- **Suicide was the eleventh leading cause of death in the U.S. in 2004,** claiming over 32,000 lives.[ii] **Depression is responsible for up to 70 percent of psychiatric hospitalizations and about 40 percent of suicides.**[iii]

- **Workers with depression cost employers an estimated $44 billion per year** in lost productive work time.[iv] Major depression is the **leading cause of disability** in the U.S. for ages 15-44.[v]

- Individuals with chronic medical conditions are at increased risk of depression—and depression increases healthcare use and expenditures among individuals with chronic disease.[vi] **Depression increases the risk of dying from heart disease by as much as three-fold**.[vii]

Research shows that treatment success is highly individualized—*one size does <u>not</u> fit all*

- The brain is a complex organ and no single mental health medication works for all patients. **Each person reacts differently to particular medications and may experience very different side effects**, such as weight gain, headaches, and nausea, among others. A specific medication that may help one individual may not help another with the same diagnosis.

- In the largest study ever done to evaluate depression treatment, the federally funded STAR*D study**,** **about a third of participants with major depressive disorder became largely symptom-free** after treatment with an antidepressant. **About one in four people will get better after switching to a different antidepressant medication after treatment failure with an initial SSRI.** We also know that by adding a new medication to the mix, about one in three people will get better.[viii]

- While about one in three will get better on the first treatment they receive for depression, many individuals will need to keep trying different treatment regimens or combinations to get better.[ix] **Access to a full array of medication choices is vital for the majority who will need other treatment options.**

- According to one of the STAR*D researchers, the study provides important information that intolerance or lack of efficacy with one SSRI antidepressant does not seem to predict the same with another.[x]

Antidepressants have different mechanisms of action and are <u>not</u> interchangeable.

[i] National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, *The Numbers Count: Mental Disorders In America*, (2006 rev), http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/numbers.cfm

[ii] National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, *Suicide In The U.S.: Statistics And Prevention*, NIH Publication No. 03-4594, (2006 rev).

[iii] National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, *Questions And Answers About The NIMH Sequenced Treatment Alternatives To Relieve Depression (STAR*D) Study—Background*, (2006 rev), http://www.nimh.nih.gov/healthinformation/stard_qa_general.cfm.

[iv] Stewart, Ricci, Chee, Hahn, and Morganstein, *Cost of Lost Productive Work Time Among US Workers with Depression*, JAMA, June 18, 2003—Vol 289, No. 23

[v] Ibid, i.

[vi] National Business Group on Health, Center for Prevention and Health Services, *An Employer's Guide to Behavioral Health Services*, 2005, p.27.New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America. Final Report.* DHHS Pub. No. SMA-03-3832. Rockville, MD: 2003, p.21.

[vii] New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America. Final Report.* DHHS Pub. No. SMA-03-3832. Rockville, MD: 2003, p.21.

[viii] National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, *Questions And Answers About The NIMH Sequenced Treatment Alternatives To Relieve Depression (STAR*D) Study—Level 2 Results, Published In New England Journal of Medicine*, (2006), http://www.nimh.nih.gov/healthinformation/stard_qa_level2.cfm

[ix] National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, *Switching To A Third Antidepressant medication May Prove Helpful To Some With Treatment-resistant Depression*, (2006), http://www.nimh.nih.gov/press/stard3.cfm.

[x] National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, *New Strategies Help Depressed Patients Become Symptom-Free*, (2006), http://www.nimh.nih.gov/press/stard2.cfm.