

Recognise mental illness, treatments

BUSINESS IS PERSONAL



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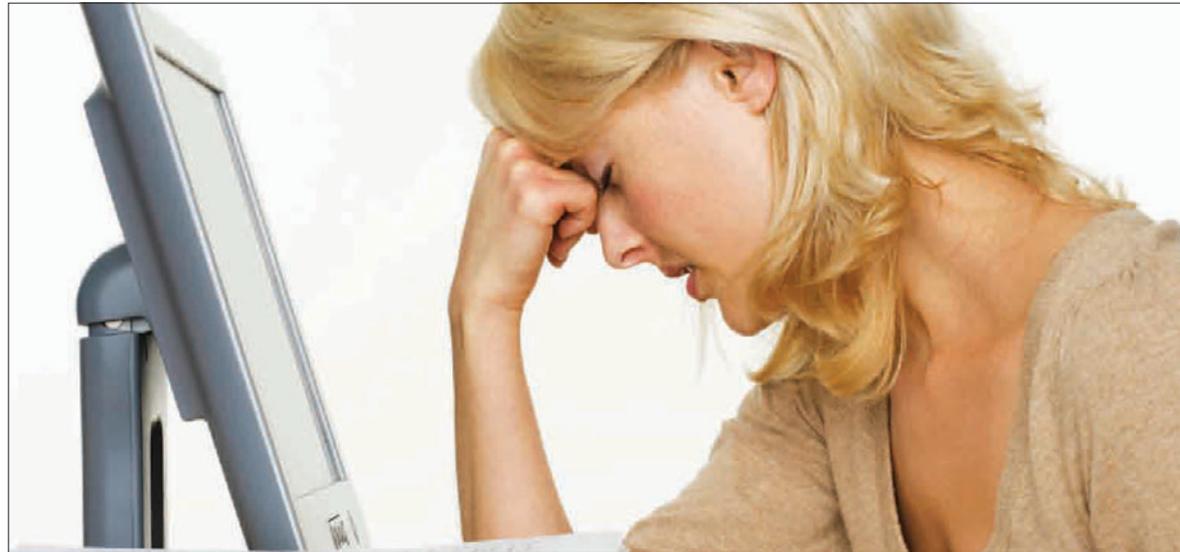
Spring time is a wonderful season as it represents growth, renewal and new beginnings. The colours associated with the season are bright, lively and vivid. Energy is flowing and motivation is apparent.

But for some, spring time is not so bright, lively and vivid. The darkness from winter remains and never really lets up. Depression is a reality and there is no way to differentiate the seasons or moods that are felt. Everything in life stays the same, low moods are the norm and feelings of happiness and livelihood are non-existent.

Mental health disorders affect around 450 million people in today's world according to the estimates given to WHO's World Health Report in 2001. One in every four persons will be affected by a mental health disorder in his/her lifetime and it's estimated that by the year 2020, depression will become the second leading cause of disease - currently it's in the top 20.

Given these facts and figures, it is easily understood why it's important for mental health providers, educators and policy makers to promote, educate and advocate for community awareness around mental health disorders.

It's especially important to educate the public on this topic considering 1) we continue to view physical and mental health as two separate domains 2) there is an uneasiness associated with talk-



Depression can be cured.

ing about mental health due to a lack of understanding on the aetiology, diagnosis and treatment for various mental health disorders and 3) barriers continue to exist for treatment due to the stigmas associated with being treated for a mental health disorder.

One of the main barriers to the general understanding of mental health disorders is the way we categorise physical and mental health as two separate functions. Our mind and body are connected and cannot function without each another. Our physical body relies on our mental capacities and vice versa. Because we separate physical illness (of the body) and men-

tal illness (mind, mood and behaviour) a stigma automatically exists, which interferes with the process of the general understanding of the aetiology, diagnosis and treatment of these disorders.

From the statistics alone, we know that at least 25 per cent of our population suffer from some form of mental illness and from that 25 per cent, nearly two-thirds do not seek treatment. Stigma is the main barrier to treatment as it discourages people from asking for help. Because of the perceived separation in our minds of physical/mental health, the stigma remains. The fear of being labelled if diagnosed and treated often

outweighs the desire to actually seek treatment. One may ask: What if people think I'm crazy? Will people treat me differently? Will people think I have control over how I am feeling? What will they say about me?

Take depression for example, there are a variety of factors that potentially cause the onset of the illness; it can be genetic, biological and/or environmental in nature. When an individual is diagnosed with depression he/she will need some form of treatment which may include medication, therapy, or both. Treatment is individualised, is often ongoing and requires the support and un-

derstanding from family, friends, colleagues and employer in order to help the individual get better over a period of time. If the support mechanisms are lacking or if, for example, the family doesn't support the treatment recommendations, there is usually a lack of compliance to treatment, which equates to continued illness (not much different than someone diagnosed with diabetes).

Treating mental health disorders is very much the same as treating a physical condition such as diabetes. What people don't understand is the fact that mental illness is an illness and needs to be recognised as such and be treated.

ed. Illnesses of the mind are NOT about moral failings or lack of will power.

The solution to the education, promotion and awareness and treatment of individuals identified with mental health disorders is for the general population to recognise and accept that 1) the mind and body are connected and rely on one another to function - neither exists in pure isolation from one another 2) mental illnesses are legitimate illnesses and not a result of moral failings or limited will power 3) in order for successful recovery, the individual needs treatment and support from family and friends.