

HEALTH NEWS

New Tool Available For Recognizing, Diagnosing And Treating Bipolar Disorder

(NAPS)—*Do you know someone who sometimes has devastating lows, then incredible energy or creativity? Is reckless, risk-taking or impulsive? Doesn't seem to need sleep at times? If so, your friend or loved one may be living with bipolar disorder.*

Bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depression, can be challenging to recognize and diagnose. People with bipolar disorder have distinct mood swings (happier, more talkative, or more irritable than usual), a reduced need for sleep, more rapid speech, an increase in restlessness or agitation, or reckless actions, including buying sprees or promiscuity. Sometimes these symptoms can be dismissed as common depression or a sudden burst of creative energy. If left undiagnosed and untreated, bipolar disorder can have serious consequences, including suicide.

"Bipolar disorder, which affects more than 2.5 million people in the U.S., is a serious, potentially fatal illness, and getting an accurate diagnosis is a challenge for many people," said Lydia Lewis, executive director of National DMDA.

That is why the National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association (National DMDA) developed the "Taking On (And Talking On) Bipolar Disorder" kit to help family members who are grappling with these issues approach their loved one to let them know that they are not alone. The kit also addresses the unique needs of people who believe they may have bipolar disorder.

"This kit can help people recognize the symptoms of bipolar disorder and enable them to initiate a conversation about this disease. The goal is for people with bipolar

disorder to obtain an earlier accurate diagnosis, and get treatment, which can help," said Lewis.

Oftentimes, family and friends, not the individual, are the ones to notice changes. However, family members sometimes are uncertain if a change in a loved one's behavior is temporary, or if it is an indication of a more serious illness. And, if they think there may be a problem, people are uncertain how to approach the person without generating fear, anger or worse.

"Carefully intervening is very important when dealing with a loved one you believe may have bipolar disorder. Make sure they see a doctor and receive the right treatment. It can be a matter of life or death," said Dana Caruso, a person living with bipolar disorder and a certified social worker.

Early diagnosis and proper treatment can help people avoid marital/work problems, career chaos, and problems with the law. Other serious consequences may be suicide (more than 30 percent of people with bipolar disorder will attempt suicide) and alcohol/substance abuse (more than 50 percent of people with bipolar disorder abuse drugs or alcohol).

"Taking On (And Talking On) Bipolar Disorder" is available free of charge from National DMDA by calling toll-free, 800-826-3632 or via the Internet at <http://www.ndmda.org>.

The kit is written by a nationally-recognized bipolar disorder medical expert and the National DMDA. It contains information designed specifically to help family members initiate a conversation about bipolar disorder with a loved one, as well as tools to help the person with bipolar disorder deal with the disease.