



Prince of Peace Parish Nursing

As I mentioned last month, Prince of Peace is starting a Parish Nurse Program. One thing I want to do is offer health related articles. I plan to vary the topics but if anyone has a particular subject you'd like for me to research, just let me know. This month, I have chosen to touch on the subject of depression.

We've all had periods of feeling sad or down, but when that feeling does not pass within a couple of days, interferes with daily activities or causes misery for yourself or those who love you, it is time to seek help. There are a variety of methods that can help relieve depression, from medications to psychotherapies.

There are different types and levels of depression. An individual person may suffer from just one type or may, over the course of time, experience different levels of depression. One form of depression is referred to as SAD, or Seasonal Affective Disorder. This type occurs during the winter months and may be associated with a person being exposed to less natural sunlight. It can be treated with light therapy, possibly combined with antidepressant medication and/or psychotherapy.

Some women suffer from Postpartum Depression after giving birth. Hormonal and physical changes may contribute to this type of depression. A sense of overwhelming sadness, can cause extreme distress to a mother who may not understand why she is not feeling the joy she'd anticipated with the birth of her new baby.

For some, a depressed mood can last for years. This may be Persistent Depressive Disorder. People who suffer from this may also have periods where they also suffer from the more debilitating Major Depression. Major depression causes such severe symptoms of hopelessness or sadness that it interferes with work, sleep, nutrition, relationships...pretty much any part of life. It can occur in episodes and it can wear a person down to the point of hopelessness.

Bipolar Disorder is another type of depression. This takes the form of depression alternating with a very high mood which may be accompanied by over-activity and perhaps risk-taking behaviors. There are other forms of depression as well. All are disruptive and many are dangerous.

It is believed that depression can be caused by a combination of factors, including genetic, biological and situational factors. Physical problems, such as thyroid disorders, can cause depression. There is still a lot that is as yet unknown about the causes of depression.

Seeking help for depression is key to recovery. Recognizing signs and symptoms is key to identifying a need for help. Signs might include feeling of emptiness, guilt or worthlessness. Some people present with irritability or fatigue, perhaps a loss of energy. They may no longer find pleasure in things they once enjoyed. They may lose their appetite or perhaps eat much more than they did before. Some may have trouble sleeping or they may sleep much more than normal.

Of course, thoughts of suicide and suicide attempts are more obvious signs that something is very wrong. Suicide threats must always be taken seriously. Even the most severe cases of depression can be treated.

I sometimes wonder if Christians find it even harder to seek help for their depression. You know, we are all about hope and love and joy, aren't we? Of course we are. Yet, as it turns out, we are not immune to illness, whether it be psychological, emotional or physical. As I see it, a Christian seeking help for depression is no different than a Christian seeking help for pneumonia.

You can find a lot of interesting and helpful sites online on this subject but please be careful. I chose to gather some of this information from the websites for the National Institute of Mental Health as well as Mayo Clinic's website, both easy to Google.

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10 ESV)

If you, or someone you love, may be suffering from depression, seek help. Please. You may want to start with your primary care provider. They can evaluate if there is a physical reason for your symptoms such as an adverse reaction to medication or an underlying illness. Your primary care provider should also be able to refer you to other specialists if needed.

Jesus is our reason for hope. "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10 ESV). lets us know that Jesus wants us to be able to experience joy and fulfillment. The bottom line is, we need to take care of ourselves and we need to watch out for each other. Don't dismiss feelings of despair in yourself or others. We all need help sometimes.

Sue Struck, RN