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## Depression is all too common in Canada

Voice of the City

By Simon B. Sherry and Cynthia ramasubbu

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Thursday, October 9 is National Depression Screening Day. This international event calls attention to depression as a serious, life-threatening health problem. As psychologists and as scientists who have long studied and treated depression, we are raising our voices in our city to answer four pressing questions about depression.

Depression can involve symptoms such as sadness, joylessness, irritability, hopelessness, worthlessness, guilt, suicidal thoughts, indifference, fatigue, restlessness, weight change, difficulty concentrating and sleep problems. These symptoms range in severity from mild to severe. Depression comes in many different forms: Postpartum depression occurs in women following the birth of a child. Seasonal depression is affected by weather and by time of year. Depression with psychosis includes a loss of touch with reality. And dysthymia is chronic low mood with moderate symptoms of depression. Depression often goes along with other problems such as chronic pain, medical illness, anxiety or alcohol misuse.

Too many people suffer from depression. Over three million Canadian adults will experience a diagnosable episode of depression during their life. Every year, depression costs Canada about \$14 billion in treatment expenses and lost productivity. Depression often starts at adolescence, and

affects women more frequently than men. Rates have increased markedly in recent decades—by 2020, depression will be the second most disabling health problem in North America (right behind heart disease). Depression is a major contributor to suicide. These statistics, although staggering, fail to capture how intensely a person living with depression suffers. Their family, friends and caregivers suffer too.

The exact cause of depression is presently unknown, but depression does involve several different factors coming together. Biological factors (genetics, hormones, neurotransmitters and brain abnormalities), psychological factors (life events, personality traits, self-esteem and cognitive dysfunction) and socio-cultural factors (loss/exclusion, marital problems, gender and industrialization) all play an important part in developing and in maintaining depression symptoms. Depression also comes back: An estimated 75 percent of those who have one episode of depression will experience another.

Is depression treatable? Yes! Depression has a high treatment success rate in Halifax and elsewhere. Cognitive behavioural therapy, interpersonal therapy, antidepressant medication and electroconvulsive therapy (in severe cases) are proven to reduce depression. Treatment can make a difference for 80 percent of people affected by depression, allowing them to get back to their daily lives. Sadly, nearly two out of three people with depression do not seek or receive proper treatment. Lifestyle modifications can also help to prevent depression from ever occurring. Increased play time, meditation, spirituality, relaxation, contact with nature and physical activity all protect against depression's onset. Better dietary choices, improved social relationships, helping out other people and limiting exposure to hyperreality (such as video games) also aid in preventing depression's occurrence.

Depression is a health problem of almost unfathomable magnitude. There is no more serious health problem facing Canadians today. Raise your voice in our city to get help with depression if you need it, or to encourage someone else who does.

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