

Co-Occurrence of Depression with Heart Disease

Awareness and Treatment Can Improve Overall Health and Reduce Suffering

Depression is a common, serious and costly illness that affects 1 in 10 adults in the U.S. each year, costs the Nation between \$30 - \$44 billion annually, and causes impairment, suffering, and disruption of personal, family, and work life.

Though 80 percent of depressed people can be effectively treated, nearly two out of three of those suffering from this illness do not seek or receive appropriate treatment. Effective treatments include both medication and psychotherapy, which are sometimes used in combination.

Depression Co-Occurs with Heart Disease

Of particular significance, depression often co-occurs with heart disease. When this happens, the presence of the additional illness, depression, is frequently unrecognized, leading to serious and unnecessary consequences for patients and families.

Though depressed feelings can be a common reaction to heart disease, clinical depression is not the expected reaction. For this reason, when present, specific treatment should be considered for clinical depression even in the presence of heart disease.

Appropriate diagnosis and treatment of depression may bring substantial benefits to the patient through improved medical status, enhanced quality of life, a reduction in the degree of pain and disability, and improved treatment compliance and cooperation.

Heart Disease

Research has documented a high correlation between depression and increased risk of dying or impairment in patients with coronary heart disease.

In coronary heart disease patients with a history of myocardial infarction (heart attack), the prevalence of various forms of depression is estimated from 40 to 65 percent.

18-20 percent of coronary heart patients without a history of heart attack may experience depression.

Major depression puts heart attack victims at greater risk and appears to add to the patients' disability from heart disease. Depression can contribute to a worsening of symptoms as well as poor adherence to cardiac treatment regimens.

People who survive heart attacks but suffer from major depression have a 3-4 times greater risk of dying within six months than those who do not suffer from depression.

The Symptoms of Depression

When five or more of these symptoms last for longer than two weeks, are not caused by other illnesses or medications, or disrupt usual functioning, an evaluation for depression is indicated.

Symptoms of depression include:

- Persistent sad or “empty” mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being “slowed down”
- Sleep disturbances (insomnia, early waking, or oversleeping)
- Eating disturbances (loss of appetite or overeating)
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Irritability
- Excessive crying
- Chronic aches and pains for no apparent reason

For More Information:

For a free and confidential mental health screening, go on-line to www.mhacolorado.org.