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Contact:
Shannon Jaccard, M.B.A.
Communications Director
NAMI San Diego County Walk Manager
(619) 584-5564
shannonjaccard@namisd.org
www.namisaniego.org

NAMI San Diego and UCSD release new documentary on depression and seniors

SAN DIEGO—Depression is often thought as a “normal” part of aging, but it is not. A new documentary video from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in San Diego sheds light on what depression in seniors looks like and what can be done to help.

Partnering with UCSD’s Dr. Sidney Zisook, a Professor of Psychiatry and a leading researcher on depression, this collaborative video puts a face on senior depression and dispels many of the myths that surround it. Copies will be available on August 1, 2008 from NAMI San Diego.

Consider these facts:

Of the 35 million Americans age 65 and older, about 2 million suffer from clinical depression. Another 5 million suffer from less severe forms of the illness.

Around 17% of suicide deaths in the United States occur in the population over the age of 65.

Depression predicts increased rates of death after a stroke, heart attack, hip fracture, and a variety of medical disorders. Depression is considered a risk factor for heart disease equivalent to smoking and diabetes.

Depression often goes undetected and untreated especially among older adults because they may be less willing to talk about their feelings of grief and sadness with others, and doctors may be less likely to suspect it.

Communications Director and founder of the Senior Mental Health Partnership at NAMI San Diego, Shannon Jaccard, said that oftentimes, seniors feel embarrassed or ashamed for having these thoughts and emotions, so they will keep symptoms to themselves.

“This is exactly why this video is so important for people to see. It’s needs to be okay to talk about these things. And we need to dispel the myth that depression is a normal part of aging. It is not a part of growing older to simply withdraw from life or society. It’s a sign that they need to speak with someone and be screened for depression,” said Jaccard.

While mental illnesses like depression are not curable, they are highly treatable and living in recovery is possible. Medications, talk therapy, support groups, and electro-convulsive therapy are highly successful means of dealing with depression.

Some individuals do well with one type of treatment while others require a combination of treatments at the same time. Support from family, friends, and the faith community can also be very important.

Every other month NAMI San Diego’s Senior Mental Health Partnership hosts a one-hour educational presentation at County Behavioral Health. They also offer an all-day workshop on different senior issues three times a year. The next will be held in September and the subject is older adults, PTSD and Veterans’ needs. A monthly e-newsletter on local and national senior issues is also available from NAMI San Diego.

For more information on the video, depression in seniors, or NAMI San Diego services, call (800) 523-5933. Or visit www.namisandiego.org

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