

[In the News]

By Lyric Wallwork Winik

The True Cost Of Depression

Americans overwhelmingly consider mental health every bit as important as physical health for one's well-being, according to a recent PARADE/Research!America poll. Nevertheless, most of us think mental illness isn't treated with equal importance in our health-care system, and there's ample evidence to back that up.

"Today, only 20% of people with major depression get even minimally adequate treatment, and 43% aren't being treated at all," says Dr. Thomas Insel, director of the National Institute of Mental Health.



“I needed help. I was in so much pain.”

—Ashley Judd, on battling depression

The costs are staggering: Mental illness causes more disability cases than any other form of illness in adults in America and accounts for well over \$100 billion in lost productivity each year. Sufferers also have a higher risk of developing illnesses like heart disease and an increased risk of substance abuse and suicide. Dr. Insel notes that while the U.S. has about 18,000 homicides a year, it has more than 31,000 suicides.

In any year, nearly 10% of the U.S. population

suffers from depression. "Depression has a biological basis and an environmental component," says Dr. Douglas Jacobs, director of the nonprofit Screening for Mental Health. He adds that most people respond to treatment in three to six months. Beyond drug therapies, which have vastly improved, doctors have found new ways to teach patients techniques such as "resiliency" to cope with difficult situations.

So, what keeps people from seeking treatment? Often simple misdiagnosis: Many sleep problems and chronic pain actually are symptoms of depression. In other cases, it's stigma: Ashley Judd recently revealed that she'd battled depression for years but hid her anguish.

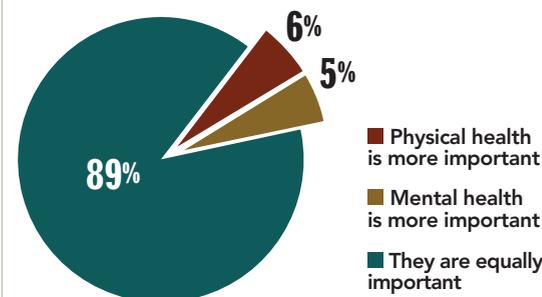
"I needed help," said the actress. "I was in so much pain." Another obstacle is lack of insurance. The PARADE/Research!America poll found that 65% of Americans "strongly agree" that mental-health services should be part of any basic health-care plan.

"These illnesses are just as real as other medical illnesses," Dr. Insel says. "If mental illness was affecting someone I loved, I would make every effort to get medically approved treatment for him or her."

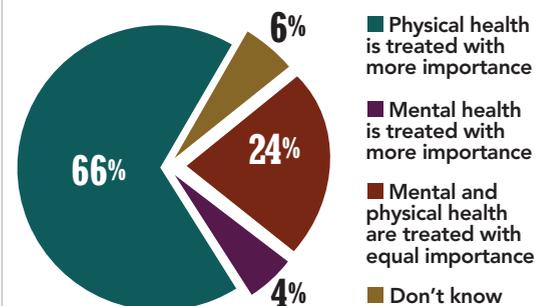
WHAT AMERICANS THINK

Millions of Americans lack health insurance, and millions more have insurance plans that don't cover mental illness. Our poll showed that most people think mental health needs to be part of any basic health plan.

Physical and mental health are equally important...



...but they are *not* treated with equal importance.



From "Taking Our Pulse: The PARADE/Research!America Health Poll"; Charlton Research Co., 2006. This poll of 1,000 people, representing a cross-section of Americans, has a sampling error of ± 3.1%. For more of the survey questions and results, visit researchamerica.org.

Where To Get a Free Screening for Depression

This Thursday, Oct. 5, is National Depression Screening Day, with free tests offered nationwide and referrals for professional assistance. For the nearest location, visit parade.com, where you also will have access to an anonymous online screening.

PHOTO BY GRAYLOCK/AP

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