

Home > Sciences > Social Science > Psychology

Depression: Is society taking the wrong approach?

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A NOVEL APPROACH TO MANAGING DEPRESSION

Simultaneously occurring scientific advances and social trends are contributing to a dramatic rise in the incidence and prevalence of depression. An increase in human longevity that extends to individuals with previously "life shortening" now chronic illnesses; and, an American culture that becomes more stressful, global, isolated and fast paced by the minute have contributed to depression's current status as a major public health problem. Despite the fact that depression is a leading cause of disability worldwide, it is often ignored or addressed only after it has evolved into a severe, life threatening condition. Once recognized, treatment may be further delayed because of stigma, misinformation, ignorance and shame. When treatment is initiated, approaches are inconsistent and dependent on providers from diverse professional and paraprofessional disciplines with distinct sometimes divergent philosophical and theoretical perspectives regarding how depression is defined, its causes, definition (s), and best treatment practices. This creates confusion regarding the paradigm or world view of depression that should provide the basis for research and treatment initiatives. Thus practices are vulnerable to undue influence by pharmaceutical and managed care companies whose motivations center on profit rather than patient care. This process has fostered divergent and competing treatment guidelines, practice standards and research and treatment initiatives that focus almost exclusively on antidepressant medications. This narrative will address depression as a major public health issue, that should be managed using a comprehensive, multimodal approach that extends beyond the current, wholly inadequate use of antidepressant medication alone.

Depression exists on a continuum ranging from transient, non clinical sadness to a variety of serious, life threatening disorders requiring aggressive psychiatric intervention. Depression at all points on the continuum can cause significant impairment in an individual's ability to function, and is a leading cause of disability worldwide yet resources remain limited. Limited access to comprehensive treatment has been linked to numerous negative effects on individuals, their families, the social and economic welfare of our nation and beyond. Despite the rising incidence and prevalence of depression it continues to receive inadequate resources for research, prevention, treatment, and professional