Dr. Dorothy K. Y. Sit, Women’s Behavioral HealthCARE, Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, will be the guest speaker at the January 12, 2005, meeting of the Depression & Bipolar Illness Support Group. Dr. Sit will be speaking on bright light treatment for mood Disorders (see article on page 3).

When you learn, teach.  
When you get, give.  

--Maya Angelou

To want to be what one can be is purpose in life.  

--Cynthia Ozick  
_ O Magazine, September 2002_
Forming a Therapeutic Alliance

A therapeutic alliance is a productive relationship between a health care provider and the person receiving treatment. In a good therapeutic relationship, both the care provider and the consumer must be active participants in developing and carrying out a treatment plan. How can you begin building a therapeutic alliance with your health care provider?

Educate Yourself About Your Illness

Learn as much as you can about the symptoms of your illness and how they affect your daily life. Read DBSA’s web site and brochures for accurate, up-to-date information. If you have questions about your illness, ask your health care provider.

Recognizing your symptoms, tracking them, and reporting them to your care providers can give them the information they need to best treat you. You may have once thought that mood swings, anxiety, risky behavior, suicidal thoughts and other symptoms were just part of your personality. Your health care providers can help you separate your true identity from your symptoms by helping you see how your illness affects your behavior. Be open with them about behaviors you want to change and set goals for making those changes.

Educate Yourself About Your Treatment

People who understand their illness, symptoms, treatments and side effects are more likely to stick with treatment. The more involved you are in your treatment, the less likely you are to become discouraged or feel hopeless.

Be honest with your health care provider regarding your concerns about your illness and its treatments. Ask questions. Find out what to expect from treatment and when. That way you won’t be surprised by medication side effects and you won’t have unrealistic expectations about how quickly treatments work. Ask your provider to help you set wellness goals and check your progress regularly.

Whenever possible, educate your family and involve them in treatment. They can play a positive role in helping you reach wellness. They can help you spot symptoms, track behaviors and gain perspective. They can also give encouraging feedback and help you make a plan to cope with crises.

Work Toward Wellness

If remission is the goal of treatment, it needs to be understood as more than just the absence of the worst symptoms. It is a return to a productive, quality life. Remission is also about a healthy lifestyle, which includes regular sleep, healthy eating and avoidance of alcohol, drugs and risky behavior. Be sure your health care provider knows what wellness means to you. Depression and bipolar disorder present many challenges. Sometimes it can be difficult to feel comfortable with a health care provider or bring up your needs. Write down your concerns and bring them with you to your appointments. Doctors like to know they have answered all of someone’s questions. Your list helps them do that. Bring a supportive friend if it helps. Know that your health care providers are there to help you. Seek a second opinion if you feel you need one. Know that you deserve the best possible care and the best possible chance at wellness and a full life.
**Bright Light Treatment for Mood Disorders**

Most people notice less energy during the short winter days, and some even have a hard time functioning. This type of seasonal depression occurs when the days grow shorter and there is less sunlight. Winter depression has been known throughout history, and is very common in places like Canada and Scandinavia.

Light therapy can improve the mood of people who experience depression during these dark days of winter. One of the methods of achieving morning bright light is with a box like the one pictured above which produces no ultraviolet light. A therapeutic bright light session usually takes a half hour to an hour although the “dose” of light can be changed daily if necessary. Researchers have also shown that bright light treatment is also effective for depressions that occur at times other than winter. The use of light therapy is a particularly attractive treatment possibility for two situations: (1) women who are pregnant -- where a depression treatment that does not involve medication is preferable; and (2) individuals with bipolar disorder -- light therapy has a relatively low risk of side effects and few interactions with medications that patients may be taking. Further information and self-tests can be found on the website for the Center for Environmental Therapeutics, [www.cet.org](http://www.cet.org). Information specifically for women and studies of bright light treatment for depression during pregnancy and for depression in bipolar disorder are available through Women's Behavioral HealthCARE at WPIC, [www.womensbehavioralhealth.org](http://www.womensbehavioralhealth.org) at 1-800-436-2461.

**Holiday Depression and Stress**

Although the holidays are supposed to be a time full of joy, good cheer and optimistic hopes for a new year, many people experience seasonal “blues.” The holiday season is a time full of parties and family gatherings, but for many people, it is also a time of self-evaluation, loneliness, reflection on past “failures” and anxiety about an uncertain future.

The “holiday blues” can be caused by many factors: increased stress and fatigue, unrealistic expectations, over-commercialization and the inability to be with one’s family. The increased demands of shopping, parties, family reunions and house guests also contribute to these feelings of tension. Even people who do not become depressed can develop other stress reactions during the holidays such as headaches, excessive drinking, over-eating and difficulty sleeping.
Although many people become depressed during the holiday season, even more respond to the excessive stress and anxiety once the holidays have passed. This post-holiday let down after January 1 can be the result of emotional disappointments experienced during the preceding months as well as the physical reactions caused by excess fatigue and stress.

Below are several ways to identify potential sources of holiday depression that can help individuals cope with the seasonal "blues:"

- Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable by not trying to make the holiday "the best ever." Try to set realistic goals for yourself. Pace yourself. Organize your time. Make a list and prioritize the most important activities. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Do not spend too much time preparing for just one day (Christmas).

- Remember the holiday season does not automatically banish reasons for feeling sad or lonely; there is room for these feelings to be present, even if the person chooses not to express them.

- Let go of the past!! Don't be disappointed if your holidays are not like they used to be. Life brings changes. Each holiday season is different and can be enjoyed in its own way. You set yourself up for sadness if everything has to be just like the "good old days." Look toward the future.

- Do something for someone else. It is an old remedy, but it can help. Try volunteering some time to help others.

- Enjoy holiday activities that are free such as driving around to look at Christmas decorations. Go window shopping without buying anything.

- Don't drink too much. Excessive drinking will only make you more depressed.

- Don't be afraid to try something new. Celebrate the holidays in a way you have not done before.

- Spend time with people who are supportive and care about you. Make new friends if you are alone during special times. Contact someone you have lost touch with.

- Find time for yourself!! Don't spend all your time providing activities for your family and friends.

Recent studies have shown that there are also environmental factors which can contribute to feelings of depression around the holidays. Some people suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD) which can result from fewer hours of sunlight as the days grow shorter during the winter months. Researchers have found, however, that phototherapy, a treatment involving a few hours of exposure to intense light, is effective in relieving depressive symptoms in patients with SAD.

Other studies on the benefits of phototherapy found that exposure to early morning sunlight was effective in relieving seasonal depression. Recent findings, however, suggest that patients respond equally well to phototherapy whether it is scheduled in the early morning or early afternoon. This finding about the usefulness of midday light has practical applications for antidepressant treatment since it allows the use of phototherapy in the workplace as well as at home.

“Holiday Depression and Stress”
National Mental Health Association, Fact Sheet (August 1997)
Depression: The Search for Treatment-Relevant Phenotypes

Researchers at UPMC Health System are seeking participants for a new research program for depression. This study will explore the features of a depressed person's mood, personality, and genetic makeup and how these features may affect a person's response to either medication or therapy. Men and women between the ages of 18 and 66 with symptoms of a major depressive disorder may be eligible. This study will provide approximately 38 to 58 weeks of interpersonal psychotherapy and/or FDA-approved antidepressant medication. Medication, therapy, and study assessments are provided at no cost. For information on this study, call The Depression and Manic Depression Prevention Program at (412) 246-5588.

Mothers – Do You Feel Overwhelmed?

UPMC is conducting a research program to learn more about the struggles faced by mothers caring for children with emotional difficulties. You may be eligible if you: --feel depressed, stressed, irritable, or overwhelmed; --are the mother of a child who is being seen at the Services for Teens at Risk (STAR) Clinic or the Center for Children and Families (CCF); --are not currently receiving individual or family counseling. Participants will receive depression screening and nine sessions of experimental talk therapy at no cost.

For more details or to find out if you qualify, please call Dana Fleming or Cathy Maihoefer at (412) 246-5566

Depression Research Studies for Women and Men Ages 18 to 60

Are you feeling sad, depressed, stressed or irritable?
Are you experiencing a loss of energy or changes in sleep?
Do you have trouble relaxing and keeping your mind on one thing?

The Depression Prevention Program, directed by Ellen Frank, PhD, is an outpatient research intervention program for depression. Dr. Frank who has worked in the field for more than 20 years has gathered together an expert staff that has been trained in the screening, diagnosis, and management of depression. We can also provide literature on depression, referrals, and support groups.

Our staff is dedicated to helping individuals suffering from depression. Currently, we are conducting various research studies that evaluate the effects of new or existing medications and experimental psychotherapies and/or other intervention methods for depression. In the majority of these studies, we provide talk intervention, medication, or both at no cost to eligible participants.

You may be eligible to participate in one of our research studies. For more information, please call the Depression Prevention Program at 412-246-5566.
Do you suffer from heart disease, depression, or both?

Researchers at UPMC Health System are investigating the possible links between mood disorders and heart disease. This study will use state-of-the-art magnetic resonance imaging and spectroscopy (MRI/MRS) to learn more about how biological changes in the brain may be related to these two illnesses. This study is seeking men and women between the ages of 40 and 70 from all ethnic backgrounds with recent diagnosis of coronary artery disease and/or symptoms of depression. Participants will undergo a psychiatric interview, physical examination and an MRI/MRS evaluation. Eligible participants will receive $150 upon completion of this study.

To learn more about this study, call
Kelly Forster Wells or Kim McCaskey at (412) 246-5566