



Date: December 27, 2015

### Mental Health



Damon Tweedy, M.D.

Although anyone can develop a mental health problem, African Americans sometimes experience more severe forms of mental health conditions due to unmet needs and other barriers. According to the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, African Americans are 20 percent more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population

According to **Damon Tweedy, M.D.**, an assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Duke University and a staff physician at the Durham VA Medical Center **"It is crucial for us to change the way that we talk about mental illness to lessen the stigma so that friends and family can have greater support in seeking help when it is needed."**

### **Common mental health disorders among African Americans include:**

- \* Major depression
- \* Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- \* Suicide, among young African American men
- \* Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), because African Americans are more likely to be victims of violent crime African Americans are also more likely to experience certain factors that increase the risk for developing a mental health condition:
  - \* Homelessness. People experiencing homelessness are at a greater risk of developing a mental health condition. African Americans make up 40 percent of the homeless population.
  - \* Exposure to violence. Increases the risk of developing a mental health condition such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. African American children are more like to be exposed to violence than other children.

It is recommended you see a mental health professional since this is their area of expertise. If you do not feel comfortable right away, a primary care doctor is a great place to start. He or she may be able to start the assessment process to determine if you have a mental health condition or assist you in getting a referral to a mental health professional.



First lady **Michelle Obama** addressed the need to reduce the stigma of getting professional help when needed. "There should be absolutely no stigma around mental health," she said at a recent mental health summit. "None. Zero. ... It's time to tell everyone who's dealing with a mental health issue that they're not alone, and that getting support and treatment isn't a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength."

Cultural shifts take time, but it's important to foster a climate in which friends and loved ones can seek non-judgmental support for a mental health condition. Doing so could make all the difference in helping others feel empowered to get the help they may need.

### What Can We Do?

- Finding out if the person is getting the care that he or she needs and wants—if not, connect him or her to help
- Expressing your concern and support
- Reminding your friend or family member that help is available and that mental health problem can be treated
- Asking questions, listening to ideas, and being responsive when the topic of mental health problems arises.
- Reassuring your friend or family member that you care about him or her
- Including your friend or family member in your plans—continue to invite him or her without being overbearing, even if your friend or family member resists your invitations
- Educating other people so they understand the facts about mental health problems and do not discriminate
- Treating people with mental health problems with respect, compassion, and empathy. By giving, you receive.

### REMEMBER

Always exercise regularly as this may help in minimizing stress, **B**e willing to seek professional help, and **C**ontrol your stress and anxiety by talking to someone, breathing deeply, laughing, and meditating.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Mental Health America Resource Center at (800) 969-6642

M-F 9am to 5pm

Nat'l Institute of Mental Health Info Ctr at (866) 615-6464 or [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

M-F 8:30am to 5pm



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