

**MENTAL HEALTH
INITIATIVE
NEWSLETTER
FOR CLASSIS QUINTE**

VOLUME 4, JUNE 2008



~ helping our communities
of faith serve those with
mental illness ~

**Letter from Chair of the Mental Health
Initiative Committee**

Who would have thought when we started this ministry 3 years ago that we would be so blessed by God. We were a small group; 2 Resource Persons for 5 hours per week and a committee of 5 with no budget. The funding we had was to pay salaries and mileage for the Resource Persons and was provided by Classis and Salem for a 3 year period.

During that period we have covered a lot of ground. We have made contacts with many Churches, individuals, councils, pastoral care teams, etc.

We have conducted a number of workshops and mini conferences and have met with community organizations and mental health agencies, both at government and private levels. We have provided advice re: setting up support systems and how to make local church communities a safer supporting place for those suffering from mental illness and their care givers.

We had a conference in Belleville [Faith and Hope in Mental Health] with an awesome keynote speaker and 9 workshops led by Mental Health professionals. The conference drew over 300 attendees which was truly fantastic! Just recently, at the May 2008 meeting of classis, this Ministry was approved by Classis as an affirmed established ministry of Classis. Praise the Lord ! And Praise Him we need to do, because there was no way we could have achieved this without His direct intervention.

This has been God's ministry all along. We have been humbled and greatly blessed that He chose to use us to be His hands , His feet , His Face, to do what He would have done in the area of Mental Illness in our communities. We are truly thankful to God that He has made all this possible and we look forward with much anticipation and excitement as we move on with your support, Classical support and most of all with God's support and blessing.

Ed Vanderveer

DEPRESSION IN THE WORKPLACE

- Two million employees in Canada suffer from a mental illness at any given time.
- Employees experiencing clinical depression are off an average of 40 days per year.
- Mental health claims, particularly depression, are the fastest growing category for days lost to any disability in Canada (Globe and Mail Report on Business, May 1 2008).
- Those with mental illnesses face the highest degree of stigmatization in the workplace of all persons with disabilities.
- Four out of Five persons with depression can be successfully treated (Canadian Mental Health Association).

~ VISION STATEMENT ~

We believe that God has equipped the Church with a unique potential to create relationships with those who have mental illness and their families so that they can be a vital part of the Christian community in ways that are meaningful.

DID YOU KNOW??

- Depression is different for men?
- It is often masked by other behaviours like; overworking, anger, alcohol or substance abuse?
- Men die by suicide at four times the rate of women and depression is one of the strongest risk factors for suicide?
- Male and societal attitudes have contributed to men's silence and not going for help for their depression?

Thank goodness for men of faith like Imtiaz Ahmed who are helping to break the silence. (Please see his personal story on back of this newsletter)

Men of Faith : Depression and Work

You know if someone told me a few years ago that “I” would be suffering from depression, I would have told them that they are out to lunch. My life is great. I have a loving wife and family, a good extended family. My church family is large and caring, and my job is secure and provides me with a comfortable living. I thought depressed people were those who are weak, cannot handle stress and over emphasize their crisis. So imagine my shock when one day I could not control my emotions at work where you are expected to remain stoic and in control.

I had just taken a promotion as a front line manager and the place that I work in was in a unit maintenance shutdown. Each day was a struggle to breathe let alone schedule with the organization. I remember one night when I was sitting in my car waiting for my daughter to come out from orchestra practice; I was terrified of going to work the next day. My body locked up with anxiety and fear. I started to cry because life did not seem very important anymore and nothing mattered. I could not understand what it was to feel this empty and completely helpless to control my thoughts and my emotions. Unless you have been through it, you cannot empathize with those with depression. My life had not changed but my perspective of life changed completely. People around you respond differently; especially people at work. They think you are weak and incapable or incompetent. This was my first charge as a supervisor and not all the crewmembers were enthusiastic. This can happen even in a workplace that prides itself on life and family balance. The organizations’ response was difficult to take and very disappointing. I was the same person that was good enough to promote and within weeks, all those years of great work vanished. Why? People still view depression, men in particular, as a weakness. In some way I believed that and shied away from responsibility. I did not want many people knowing about this for the fear of being treated differently.

After the diagnoses of depression by my family doctor, I started to take antidepressant medication. I also attended counselling to understand this condition more. Fortunately, for me, I was able to get back to work in weeks after the drug started working. However, this was not the end of my depression. Six years later, I am still taking medication. My response to antidepressant drugs was relatively quick but for many this can take a long time. It is time well spent because you will be back to yourself.

Depression is something you have, it should not define who you are, and it is never the end

of your story. I think I am better now with depression because I understand human beings at a much deeper level. I feel I can be a better person, a church elder, a father, and husband. Depression has certainly made me a much better supervisor. The “Potter” molds you into a better person. Perhaps it was God’s plan for my personal growth and for His work that this should be part of my journey through life.

Still to this day, I can say that was a moment in time that continues to affect my career. I left my department, not because I could not do the job or that good medicine had helped me return to normal, but because I felt, I had too. I found out that it is easier to fight depression than the misunderstanding of depression. The event was not something this work group and, surprisingly, the organization was capable of getting past. People need to understand that it is a chemical imbalance in the brain and that with proper treatment; the person is back to normal. Depression was actually an asset because it showed me what a fantastic wife God has blessed me with. She took care of me when I did not know what was going on. She never judged me or lost respect for me. I also needed a diversion and a project (finishing the basement) gave me the focus and sense of accomplishment that depression tends to take away.

The people at church were of great support because they have seen and prayed for others with depression and other mental health diseases. To get past the diagnosis, surround your self with people who are positive, uplifting and who care for you and do not judge you because of depression. Use self-talk techniques to break the cycle of negative thoughts. You will come out of it and you will have acquired a new perspective of life. You will be forced to make decisions on what is really important in life; like God, family and health before work, career, and material gains.

Imtiaz Ahmed

Blessings,
From your Mental Health Resource Team

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Have a great summer!