



NEWS RELEASE

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DEPRESSION AWARENESS DAY

MPA's ongoing efforts to create understanding of depression

Kuala Lumpur, 27 April 2011 –Depression, a familiar word but often misunderstood, is a significant health problem. The impact on the quality of life for people affected by depression can be severe and with the ongoing stigma, there is little understanding of the condition. To create awareness and understanding of depression, the Malaysian Psychiatric Association (MPA) held a Depression Awareness Day media briefing.

Depression is a common mental disorder, characterized by low mood, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, low energy and poor concentration. Depression also makes a person feel hopeless, worthless, pessimistic and guilty. These problems can become chronic or recurrent, substantially impairing an individual's ability to cope with daily life. At its most severe, depression can lead to suicide. Most cases of depression can be treated with medication or psychotherapy.¹

Misperception and a negative stigma attached to depression are some of the common factors preventing people from seeking treatment. "Depression is a complex condition. There are many types of depression and the focus for this year's Depression Awareness Day is post-partum depression and the theme is "Post Partum Depression: Unraveling the Myths" Most people are not familiar with the nature of the symptoms of post partum depression, even among the health care professionals and some even dismiss existence of the diagnosis. The sad thing about post partum depression is that the person was denied the right of being depressed, as she is not supposed to feel sad after the delivery. Everyone expects that pregnant women look forward to the day when they can cuddle their babies and started their journey of motherhood. The reality is that postpartum depression is a common occurrence, despite that not many women who experience it aren't willing to admit it. It is estimated that postpartum depression affects from 10 to 20 percent of new mothers. Post partum depression is the number one complication of childbirth. Suffering from depression after a delivery will affect the well-being of both the mother and child. However, similar with any other depressive conditions, post-partum depression is treatable," said Dr Abdul Kadir Abu Bakar, MPA's president.

There are many myths about post partum depression and together with the lack of knowledge on the actual condition prevent the mothers from seeking the appropriate treatment.

¹<http://www.who.int/topics/depression/en/> Accessed on 15 April 2011

"Accurate diagnosis and early treatment with appropriate medication is important to ensure the good outcome and to reduce incidence of relapse for any type of depressive condition," added Dr Abdul Kadir. Researchers have found that the likelihood for depressive episodes to recur becomes more likely with each episode – after the first episode, the chances of it recurring is less than 50%, but after the second episode the likelihood increases to 70%, and after the third episode, the likelihood is more than 90%.²

In order to detect depression at the very early stage and to treat the condition appropriately, MPA conducted an outreach to medical practitioners in collaboration with Pfizer Malaysia. "General practitioners (GPs) are usually the first point of contact for people suffering from depression. Most of the time, GPs treat the condition symptomatically and not the root of the illness. As such, MPA has partnered with Pfizer Malaysia in conducting a GP outreach effort in the PRIME-MD™ (Primary Care Evaluation of Mental Disorders) project," added Dr Abdul Kadir. The role of community help services provided by the organization like the Befrienders Malaysia is also paramount in providing a mean for the sufferers to ask for assistance.

To date, we have conducted three GP workshops for the PRIME MD™ project in Malaysia. The programme consists of a depression and anxiety module, validation of the results from the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ), case simulations, treatment guidelines and an assessment for clinicians to be accredited by MPA to diagnose depression and anxiety. We hope that with this continuous education, GPs will be able to identify and diagnose patients who are suffering from depression and treat the condition in its early stages," said Dr Vicknesh Wellupilai, Medical Director for Pfizer Malaysia.

The media briefing session included a discussion panel with three experts, Dr Abdul Kadir (MPA's President), Prof Nor Zuraida Zainal (Psychiatrist, Head of Psychiatric Department, UMMC) Dr Nurashikin Ibrahim (Deputy Director from KKM) and renowned local personality, Wardina Saffiyah, who will be sharing her personal experience on suffering from post-natal depression and how she overcomes the condition.

There is a variety of treatment options from psychological intervention to pharmacological treatment to treat depression including post partum depression. A number of effective medications are available for depression and the right one or the right combination of them can usually be found for each person with the illness based on the patients' symptoms and side effect profile.

"Even amongst patients who are receiving treatment, there is also the issue of drug compliance. Patients tend to discontinue due to a lack of response, stigma associated with having a psychiatric illness and side effects," commented Prof Nor Zuraida, Head of Department of Psychological Medicine at the University Malaya Medical Centre. It must be emphasized that a new mother needs to remember that the "blues" are normal but if they continue after about two weeks, it is possible that true postpartum depression has set in and counseling and treatment should be sought. The fact that there are treatments available for post partum depression and they are effective.

Depression Awareness Day is an annual event that is organized by MPA. The essence of this event is to create awareness on mental illnesses in general and specifically on depressive disorders.

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²Keller MB, Boland RJ. *Biol Psychiatry*. 1998.;44:348-360.

About the Malaysian Psychiatric Association (MPA)

The MPA was formally inaugurated by the then Honourable Minister of Health Tan Sri Lee Siok Yew on 19th March 1977 at Hospital Bahagia, Ulu Kinta.

MPA regularly organizes scientific/clinical meetings and conferences discussing various topics of interest in psychiatry and Mental Health. It is a founding member of the ASEAN Federation for Psychiatry and Mental Health. In 1988 the MPA joined the World Psychiatric Association (WPA)

The MPA is concerned with several issues among which are:

1. The National Mental Health Policy
2. The New Mental Health Act
3. Ethical Code of members
4. Public Health Education
5. Mental Health Insurance

Training of doctors and General Practitioners (GP) in psychiatry will take a prominent role for future activities apart from continuing the present Continuing Medical Education (CME) programmes.

About Pfizer

Pfizer Malaysia is committed towards *Working Together for a Healthier World*. We practice this by playing an active role in the community and through good business practices. Pfizer has a strong portfolio of products in cardiovascular, neurology, infectious diseases, arthritis/pain, urology, ophthalmology and oncology. Pfizer Malaysia began operations in 1964 and currently employs over 300 colleagues with nine offices throughout the country.

PRIME MD™ was originally developed under an educational grant provided by Pfizer Inc. that screens for five of the most common groups of disorders in primary care : depressive, anxiety, alcohol, somatoform and eating disorders.³

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³ Validation and Utility of a self-report version of PRIME-MD – The PHQ Primary Care Study; JAMA, November 10, 1999 – Vol 282, No. 18