

MEDIA STATEMENT

For immediate release

To: Editors & Health Journalists

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World Health Day 2017 – Depression: Let’s Talk

World Health Day is commemorated annually on 7 April. On this day the whole world focuses attention on a specific health topic of concern to people all over the world.

The focus for 2017 World Health Day is depression under a slogan: **Depression: let’s talk.**

As the whole world places mental health under the spotlight on this World Health Day, the Department of Health recognizes the fact that many of people suffering from depression suffer in silence for fear of being stigmatized and discriminated against if they say they are depressed and if they seek treatment. This theme encourages all of us to talk openly about depression. Those of us that are feeling depressed are encouraged to talk to others about how we are feeling and to share our sadness or the difficulties we are having with others. Talking about one’s problems and feelings is an important way of relieving oneself of symptoms of depression.

The Department encourages all South Africans including the public sector, civil society, communities, the media, religious groups, educational institutions, workplaces, households and other groups and individuals to talk openly about depression. Through this we will all become far more aware of depression, its signs and symptoms, how common it is and we will together overcome the stigma and myths that are often associated with depression and other mental illnesses which often lead to people not coming forward and seeking help. Those who are already suffering from depression should be given the necessary support. We urge those that are feeling depressed to talk to others about their feelings and to seek help; and we encourage family members and friends to listen very carefully, support the person who is depressed and assist them to get help if they need more than you can give them.

Depression affects people of all ages, from all walks of life and impacts on people’s ability to carry out even the simplest daily tasks with sometimes devastating consequences in family relations, child rearing, adherence to medication and other important aspects of life.

Common signs of depression include persistent sadness and loss of interest in activities that you normally enjoy, for at least two weeks. In addition people with depression have several of the following symptoms: loss of energy; change in appetite; sleeping more or less; reduced

concentration; feeling anxious; feeling worthless; inability to take even simple decisions; guilt and hopelessness. At worst depression can lead to suicide!

While South Africa has a limited number of mental health professionals such as psychiatrists and psychologists, especially in the public sector, and this is something that needs to be improved together with increasing other health personnel, we do provide assistance to people with mental health problems at all levels of the health system, including at primary health care level. At the same time we appreciate the work that is done by Non-Governmental Organizations in supporting people with depression and other mental health problems. As the world observes this important day under this important theme, the Department pledges to continue to strengthen and increase access to quality mental health services and improve its efforts of educating the public about early signs of depression and other mental illness so that those affected talk to others around them, and seek help where this is required.

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