

MEDIA RELEASE

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Childhood/teen depression and suicide focus of free information forum for parents

Local and international experts weigh in on epidemic affecting almost 17,000 Metro Vancouver children and teens



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A panel of local and international experts on childhood and adolescent depression and suicide will offer critical information and insights into this issue at a free forum for parents on Jan. 24. The forum, "Depression...living and winning," takes place at the Chan Auditorium and Chieng Atrium at the Child and Family Research Institute at BC Children's Hospital.

The forum will provide information about the causes, signs and symptoms of depression in children and teens, the role of family, friends, prescription drugs and counseling, and how and where parents may seek help and resources. Following the formal presentations will be a discussion period involving all of the speakers.

One-in-five teens has had at least one episode of depression by the end of his or her teen years according to Dr. Jane Garland, one of the forum's presenters and a psychiatrist at BC Children's Hospital. Yet 25-50 per cent of cases of depression in children and teens go undiagnosed. Depression has negative effects on children's physical health, academic achievement and social development.

"The estimated prevalence of depression in children and teens is 3.5 per cent, and that figure is often higher in teens. And, after having an episode of depression, he or she has a 50-75 per cent chance of having another episode within five years. We need to look at early detection and intervention and preventing future episodes, if possible," said Dr. Garland.

"The signs and symptoms of depression in children and teens are similar to that in adults. If, for more than two weeks, your child or teen daily experiences depressed mood and at least four of the following other symptoms – changes in sleep, changes in eating/weight, poor concentration, suicidal thinking, poor energy, feelings of guilt/worthlessness – then it's likely he or she is depressed, and needs to be evaluated by a physician," said Dr. Garland. "Of course, other causes for these symptoms such as acute grief, drug use or medical illness also need to be considered."

"Younger children may primarily exhibit an "irritable" mood plus five of those other symptoms. They may appear very anxious and clingy, and may have feelings of being unloved and blamed by others rather than guilt or worthlessness," added Dr. Garland.

Dr. Garland says that depression is caused by many factors interacting as opposed to a single component. Contributing factors include genetic risk, effects of losses, trauma and abuse, and chronic stresses such as learning or attention disorders, family problems or medical illness. Although there is a great deal of genetic research underway, a specific gene for depression has not been identified. In extreme cases, depression may lead to suicide or suicidal thoughts.

Garland will be joined by other panelists including Dr. Allan Young, a psychiatrist and the chair of depression research at the UBC Institute of Mental Health. Dr. Young will talk

chair of depression research at the UBC Institute of Mental Health. Dr. Young will talk about the darkest side of depression, suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for 10-24 year olds in Canada (CPA, 2002).

The event takes place Jan. 24 from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. Space is limited so please RSVP in advance at www.thekeltyfoundation.org or by calling Maggie Miranda at 604-925-1939.

The event is presented by The Kelty Patrick Dennehy Foundation in partnership with BC Mental Health & Addiction Services (BCMHAS), an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA), and BC Children's Hospital Foundation.

The Kelty Patrick Dennehy Foundation was established in 2001 by Whistler residents Kerry and Ginny Dennehy after their 17-year-old son, Kelty, took his own life after battling depression. The mission of the foundation is to raise awareness of the magnitude of depression and the effect it has on young people and our society, and to remove the stigma associated with depression by taking a leadership role in education, effective treatments, and the research effort.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Programs at BC Children's Hospital are managed and administered by BC Mental Health & Addiction Services, agencies of the Provincial Health Services Authority.

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