

WCM-Q expert discusses depression and its treatments

Doha – May 17, 2017: Depression and ways to treat it were discussed by a leading psychiatrist as members of the public were invited to Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q) for the latest installment of the Ask the Expert series.

Dr. Aicha Hind Rifai, WCM-Q's Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychiatry, gave an interactive presentation which explained the symptoms of depression, and ways that it can be effectively treated or managed with medications, therapy and lifestyle changes. Dr. Rifai also said that people suffering with depression or any form of mental illness should not be put off from seeking help by stigma.

Dr. Rifai said: "Depression is an illness that we can treat, often very successfully. It is not something to be ashamed of. If you are worried that you may be depressed you should see your doctor, just as you would with any other health concern. We are here to offer help and support without judgment and in total confidence."

Dr. Rifai explained that depression is a complex condition that can be caused by many different factors or a combination of factors and which has many different symptoms. The condition is generally characterized by one or more of the following: persistent sadness, feelings of hopelessness, lethargy or anxiety, disturbed sleeping patterns, crying spells, appetite changes, irritability and social withdrawal, among others. Some people with depression may also have recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.

Causes can also vary a great deal and can often be hard to identify. Sometimes depression appears to be caused by stress at home or at work, physical illness, loss, social isolation, relationship problems, bereavement, or hormonal changes caused by a recent pregnancy, and other factors. In some cases, depression or depressive episodes may be triggered by a stressful or saddening life event, but in other cases people may feel depressed for no apparent reason. Whatever might be the cause, seeking help from professionals is recommended. In cases of post-partum depression where young children are involved, or when thoughts of suicide are frequent, professional care should be sought without delay.

Dr. Rifai said: "Depression often appears to be caused by a complex interaction of many factors, which can be emotional, physical or cognitive. In general, if a person's emotional state has a persistent negative effect on their daily lives and their enjoyment of life, we will be more likely to evaluate them as being depressed. The quicker depression is addressed the easier it is to treat. Early treatment also helps to prevent negative impact on the person's health and that of their family.

"Depression is often characterized by feelings of hopelessness and that things simply will never get better. I want to tell you that I personally have seen many patients who felt this way who we were able to treat successfully and who have gone on to regain happiness and fulfillment from their lives."

If depression is diagnosed, treatment can include antidepressant medication, cognitive therapy, counseling, lifestyle changes such as altering one's work-life balance, or a combination of several approaches.



Dr. Rifai added: “Our goal is to help people regain enjoyment of their lives and to help them return to their normal level of function.”

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About Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar

Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar is a partnership between Cornell University and Qatar Foundation. It offers a comprehensive six-year medical program leading to the Cornell University M.D. degree with teaching by Cornell and Weill Cornell faculty and by physicians at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), Aspetar Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, the Primary Health Care Corporation, the Feto Maternal Center, and the Sidra Medical and Research Center who hold Weill Cornell appointments. Through its biomedical research program, WCM-Q is building a sustainable research community in Qatar while advancing basic science and clinical research. Through its medical college, WCM-Q seeks to provide the finest education possible for medical students, to improve health care both now and for future generations, and to provide high quality health care to the Qatari population.

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