

# The Tribute



**December, 2017**

**What you will learn:**

- **Definition of Depression**
- **Manifestations of depression**
- **Tips to help patients/families**

The Tribute is a monthly newsletter published for member agencies in honor of our Hospice volunteers.

© Copyright AHHC 2017  
May be reproduced for Hospice Volunteers.  
Editor: Cindy Morgan, RN, MSN, CHC, CHPN, VP for Hospice, Palliative Care & Clinical Innovations.

**THANK YOU!**

We have grown up believing that Christmas is a time to be Merry and Bright! It is a time to be with family and special friends. This is not always the case, especially in light of the patients and families at the end of life we care for in our hospice programs. The patient and families are dealing with the impending death and many are having anticipatory grief. Anticipatory grief is the “grief reaction that occurs before an impending loss.” Others may be experiencing feelings of sadness because of previous losses and remembering those loved ones who have already died or wishing they could be with family, but for various reasons cannot. A few examples of why we may find our patients and families not so merry and bright during the holiday season.

Your visits and happy, caring attitudes and deeds are so appreciated by our hospice patients/caregivers and hospice providers. Hospice volunteers do help make their lives be merry and bright-not just during the holidays but throughout the year.

*Thank you for what you do  
Hospice Volunteers!!*

**“What we have once enjoyed we can never lose.  
All that we love deeply becomes a part of us.”**

Helen Keller

## Depression

Reports from the CDC describe Depression as a serious medical illness and an important public health issue. It is characterized by persistent sadness and sometimes irritability (particularly in children) and is one of the leading causes of disease or injury worldwide for both men and women. Depression can cause suffering for depressed individuals and can also have negative effects on their families and the communities in which they live. The economic burden of depression, including workplace costs, direct costs and suicide-related costs, was estimated to be \$210.5 billion in 2010.<sup>1</sup>

Depression can occur at any time over a person’s life. It is associated with an increased risk for mortality from suicide as well as other causes, such as heart disease.

Signs and symptoms of depression may include: Fatigue, loss of appetite, excessive sleeping, withdrawn, persistent aches and pains, decreased concentration, hopeless, and/or irritable (this list is not all inclusive). As you can see from this list of symptoms these are often seen with our hospice patients, sometimes as the result of past treatment or medications or as patient decline at the end of life, therefore the depression may be masked, because of the similarities. However, when you are spending time with the patient/caregiver, observe for these signs of depression. If you detect any of them, it is important to communicate this information to your Volunteer Manager/Coordinator, in order for the IDG to become aware of your findings. Remember, you are a part of the hospice team—communication and coordination are key components of ensuring our patients/caregivers’ hospice experience is the best it can be.



### *Suggestions to Help Prevent Holiday Depression*

**Plan ahead**—Decide early on what is most important to you and your family and plan accordingly. It is ok to say “no” when something doesn’t fit into the schedule.

**Avoid family conflicts**—If suspect of family conflict, have some neutral lines such as, “I am happy to discuss that at a later time?”

**Forget perfection**—It may be impossible to find the perfect gift, so stop stressing over it.

**Learn to grieve**—Grieving is an individual experience for each person. Allow it to happen.

**Schedule some sleep**- Taking care of yourself is most important. Maintain regular sleep schedules. Losing sleep is not healthy.

**Get help**—If you need help, ask for it. Ask friends or family or even paid caregivers if needed to allow for a break.

**Prioritize workouts**—Maintain regular exercise program. It can provide both anti-anxiety and anti-depression for those who engage.

**Consider your light exposure**- SAD is a type of depression resulting from lack of exposure to daylight.

**Focus on what matters** - Don't binge on food or alcohol. Cut back on commitments that are not necessary.

Depression is not just having “the blues” or the emotions we feel when grieving the loss of a loved one. It is a true medical condition that is treatable, like diabetes or hypertension.

Older adults are at increased risk, but the good news is that the majority of older adults are *not* depressed.

--CDC

“Every man has his secret sorrows which the world knows not; and often times we call a man cold when he is only sad.”

--Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

### *How Volunteers May Help*

**Plan Ahead**—Encourage your patient/caregiver to give thought to what is most important during the holiday season, and what is reasonable for them to be able to do. Consideration should be made for the patient’s condition and what they can tolerate from an endurance standpoint as well as be protected from exposure to colds and influenza.

**Learn to Grieve**—Meet the patient/caregiver where they are in the grieving process. Offer support and comfort.

**Self-Care**—Encourage the caregiver to take care of themselves, get enough sleep, ask for help when they need it, take breaks, get some respite.

**Prioritize workouts**—Formal workouts may be out of the question, but a walk may be more realistic. Encourage some sort of physical activity. A daily walk outside could be very helpful if it can be tolerated, especially if the patient/caregiver are dealing with the Seasonal Affective Depression (SAD).

**Listen**—Patients/caregivers sometimes feel isolated, having nobody to talk to. Taking time and actively listening to what they have to say is one of the most appreciated actions we have to offer them.

**Presence**—There are times we may not know what to say- and that is ok. Being present and silent is appropriate in some situations. Presence is one of the greatest gifts we can give to our patients/caregivers at the end of life.

***“Depression is Not a Normal Part of Growing Older”***