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Family Medicine Clerkship
Plain Language Summary

Title: Depression in your primary care doctors office: What are we doing to help you?

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Plain Language Summary:

Depression is an extremely common problem. Data shows that about one in four people will have at least one time where they will meet the criteria for “Major Depressive Disorder,” the medical term for significant depression that lasts more than six weeks. Some people are depressed and seek help just one time in their life, others struggle with depression for much of their lives.

If you or a person you know is struggling with depression the first step is to visit a primary care physician to seek help. At this visit the doctor will ask a series of questions to find out whether the depressed mood is severe and has lasted a while. If so, special support is often needed to return to the previous state of emotional balance. Medication, therapy, a special doctor for depression (a psychiatrist), regular office visits to survey for progress, and a special person in the clinic who helps everyone with depression to make appointments and follow their care plan (a case manager) are some of the best forms of support.

In Minnesota and some other places in the United States, primary care clinics are beginning to create special programs that combine all of the support options together. These clinics have been called “the diamond project” and they have found that when all the forms of support- medication, therapy, psychiatry, regular office visits, and a case manager- are combined together, more patients get better. In numbers, of the people who did not use this special coordinated program about 1/10 people were better from their depression after six months of treatment, but of the people who used the program about 3/10 people were better from their depression after six months. That is 3 times better or two extra people out of ten.

So if you or someone else is feeling depressed, go to your primary doctor and ask for help. And also ask your doctor what extra support the clinic provides. Do they have therapists? Do they have someone to call you and check in? Do they have a psychiatrist? The more of these options they have access to, the higher chance the depression will be better in six months.

Additional Resources:

Information on Depression: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001941/>

A list of Diamond Clinics: http://www.icsi.org/health_care_redesign_/diamond_35953/

Mental health support organization: <http://www.nami.org/>

Government website on Mental Health Research: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

Key Words:

Depression
Psychiatry
Primary Care
Mental Health

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