

## **FEELING DEPRESSED?**

As a Behavioral Health Therapist who has now lived in Unalaska for one year, I would like to discuss my impressions of the various types of depression I have encountered. Depression is a feeling of doom and gloom, overwhelming sadness and hopelessness. Some people manifest such diverse symptoms as: sleeping too much, insomnia or fitful sleep; no appetite, eating too much, or craving sweets and fatty foods; feeling irritable or angry; thinking of harming themselves; inability to experience pleasure; and many other symptoms. These symptoms can range from mild to moderate to severe and may fluctuate over time. Depression results from many different sources and there are many different tools and techniques to help alleviate the symptoms.

People feel depressed for a number of different reasons. They may have an imbalance of brain chemistry. There may be a situation in their life involving tragedy, trauma, major loss, and/or medical issues such as chronic illness or chronic pain. Seasonal Affective Disorder, (SAD), is another source of depressive symptoms suffered by people whose moods appear to be impacted by the amount of daylight they experience. Last, but not least, there are a number of folks who experience symptoms of depression because of the situations in which they find themselves.

An imbalance of brain chemistry is best treated by a combination of medication specific for mood disorders and psychotherapy. Since we do not have the capability as yet to directly test brain chemicals, we must use a trial and error method to see which medication will work best for each individual. This requires patience and tolerance of discomfort on the part of the person experiencing the symptoms and they may benefit from psychotherapy to help them through the process. When someone experiences tragedy, trauma, major loss, and/or medical issues such as chronic illness or chronic pain in their life, the situations will need a combination of compassion and time and may also benefit from psychotherapy and short term anti-depressant medications. In the case of chronic illness or pain, ongoing medical care will also be needed. Seasonal Affective Disorder, (SAD), is best treated with intense full spectrum light and some will also need anti-depressant medication

Situational depression is one that is difficult to identify and treat. New people arriving in Unalaska may feel trapped. For most coming here means a huge lifestyle change, the loneliness of leaving behind friends and family, a sense of being deprived due to the unavailability of goods and services most of us had taken for granted. There is a feeling of loss, isolation, and being cut off from the rest of the world because of the difficulty and expense of travel off the island. The inclement weather – wind/rain/snow – can result in inactivity and feelings of immense boredom for some people. All of these feelings mixed up together can be experienced as depression. It is very difficult for most people to accept that what they are feeling is a result of their attitude towards the situation rather than something outside themselves. It is also difficult to believe that the solution is to change the attitude and behaviors. The task with situational depression such as this is to begin to accept that being here is actually a choice the person has made, whether because of career, relationship/marriage or financial considerations. Whatever the

reason, being here is the choice the person made and that person is responsible for his/her choices. Once a person accepts responsibility for the choice, they will realize they are actually in control of being here. The next step is to begin to investigate available options. To focus on what is here rather than what is not. Where can you go? What activities are available for you to participate in? Where can you meet people to socialize with?

Some suggestions for you to investigate include: local TV and radio station broadcast of community events, local museum events and exhibits, volunteer opportunities, posters at grocery stores, church bulletins, library, PCR, etc.

If you are experiencing depressive symptoms, you may need help in sorting out exactly what is going on. Keep in mind that there are a lot of resources out there that you may draw upon which can include medication, psychotherapy, intense full spectrum light, psychotherapy and medical intervention. Remember that your best resource is your own attitude and a willingness to take action on your own behalf.