

InterSections in Practice

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FINDING HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

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Depression is like having the rug pulled out from under you, but then instead of hitting the floor, just continuing to fall and never knowing where the bottom is.

- quote from a sufferer of severe, treatment-resistant depression

Depression. One need only Google the word to discover an endless parade of articles, books, and media references that confirm its prevalence. It is a word that most everyone from kindergartners to octogenarians has at least heard and has a working (if incomplete) understanding of this malady. As is evident from the multiple articles in this edition of *InterSections in Practice*, there is certainly no lack of consensus regarding depression as a legitimate area of study or as a significant foe in our fight to improve the human condition.

Depression has been identified in some of the earliest human writings and conceptualized at different times in terms of good and evil, strength and weakness, or health and sickness. Physically, it has been said to be localized in the intestines, the bile, the heart, and most recently, the brain. It has been attacked through treatments as simple as talking and as invasive as drilling holes in the head. When each new discovery leads us to believe we

know more about its nature, depression teaches us more about our own ignorance. What, therefore, do we think we now know?

We now know that the mind influences the body in ways we never predicted and that the body influences the mind in ways we still cannot fully fathom. Current research, for example, indicates a reciprocal influence of depression and heart (Ferketick, Schwartzbaum, Frid, & Moeschberger, 2000). We know that life experience, individual personality, and genetics all contribute to the propensity for developing depression, and that some individuals overcome seemingly insurmountable odds through will or inner strength that we have yet to name or even identify. We now recognize that depression is a neurodegenerative as well as a biochemical disorder that actually alters brain function and structure over time (Mayberg, 2003). When depression continues unchecked, we have learned, the chances of a complete symptom remission are slim. Research helps us understand that depression cannot be compartmentalized into neat little containers of mind separate from brain. Depression affects and is affected by the whole person.

See *Finding Hope*, Page 3