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For immediate release

With opening of nation's second depression center, national network of such centers gets under way

University of Michigan Depression Center was nation's first, University of Colorado Denver's is second – and there are more to come

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — For decades, cancer centers and heart centers across the country have worked together to improve patient care, set national standards and foster new research for all types of cancer and cardiovascular disease.

Now it's depression's turn.

With the founding of a new Depression Center at the University of Colorado Denver School of Medicine, a national effort to link centers focused on depression and bipolar disorder has shifted into full gear.

The new Colorado center, on the Anschutz Medical Campus in Aurora, CO, joins the University of Michigan Depression Center – which since 2001 has been the nation's only comprehensive center devoted to patient care, research, education and public policy in depression and related disorders.

The two centers — and new centers now being planned at more than a dozen universities across the country — will soon form a National Network of Depression Centers.

The NNDC will make it easier for psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and other mental health professionals to share information and best practices, and to team up for major projects.

In fact, today's announcement of the new Colorado center comes just before the one-year anniversary of a meeting that brought representatives from many of those other universities together at the U-M center. That meeting laid out the framework for the NNDC, and launched a "foundation phase" for the network that continues today.

Thanks to a generous donation from retired investment banker George Wieggers, the U-M Depression Center has launched a Center Assistance Program that will help other NNDC members launch their own Depression Centers. Wieggers, a resident of Colorado, donated to found the Colorado center, which will open in August.

"Ever since we at Michigan launched our center, we had a vision of a national network that would help transform the way depression and bipolar illnesses are treated, studied and viewed in the United States and around the world," says John Greden, M.D., the executive director of the U-M Depression Center. "This is why we initiated contact with a number of universities that we knew had excellent depression and bipolar programs, and the desire to take steps to found a dedicated center. Now that the network is forming, we're eager to share with them what we have learned in our first seven years – and to learn from them as well."

— more —

Greden notes that cancer was once only whispered about, rarely cured, and carried a stigma that was similar to what depression and bipolar disorder still carry.

But now that depression, bipolar disorder and other conditions have been shown to be just as “real” as cancer — rooted in biological factors such as genetics and brain chemistry — the new network will continue the growing momentum to make that stigma a thing of the past.

It will also work to find ways to help people who have depression and bipolar disorder get the best possible diagnosis and treatment, including treatment for other co-existing conditions such as addictions and anxiety disorders.

Just as cancers were once rarely cured, and now have become mostly survivable diseases with the right detection and treatment, depression and bipolar disorder may one day reach the same state.

And since the World Health Organization has named depression as one of the most disabling human illnesses, and an estimated 19 million Americans suffer from it at any given time, the effort to improve depression care and understand it better through research is much needed.

Later this year, the founding members of the NNDC will meet again to adopt a charter for the NNDC, and set priorities. As time goes on, more centers will be welcome to join the network according to membership conditions that are being developed.

Although each center will be different according to the organizational structure of its home institution, the initial group of attendees agreed that it would create powerful momentum if standards are created and that others try for the same comprehensive approach that Michigan has taken.

Greden, the Rachel Upjohn Professor of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences at the U-M Medical School, also notes that philanthropic support will be crucial for most of the centers, as funding for facilities, start-up costs, professorships, research pilot grants and special programs may be needed.

The Michigan center has been fortunate to attract donations that have ranged from a few dollars up to \$13 million in the years since its founding, including gifts from the late Mary and Edwin Meader, Waltraud Prechter, Phil Jenkins, Tom and Nancy Upjohn Woodworth and many others, including Foundations. That support, and many other gifts, allowed the U-M Health System to complete in 2006 the new Depression Center/Ambulatory Psychiatry facility in the Rachel Upjohn Building on its East Medical Campus.

Another factor that will be key to the success of any depression center is the cooperation of many individuals from multiple areas of the center’s home university, to leverage the expertise and energy of many faculty and staff involved in depression care, research and outreach.

At U-M, the Depression Center now has more than 180 members, drawn from numerous departments of the Medical School, as well as the School of Public Health, the School of Nursing, the School of Social Work, the Dental School, the Division of Kinesiology, and the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System.

Moving forward, Greden says, the NNDC’s participating centers will work together with a common mission: “To improve the quality, effectiveness, and availability of depression and bipolar diagnosis, treatment, and prevention so patients can lead better lives.” Stated differently, he confidently states, “Together, we will conquer these disorders.”

For information:

The National Network of Depression Centers, www.nndc.org

The University of Michigan Depression Center, www.depressioncenter.org

The University of Colorado Depression Center, www.uchsc.edu/som