



HISPANIC FAMILY CENTER OF SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY

Providing the community with a broad range of culturally relevant social services and advocacy programs that promote and encourage empowerment and self sufficiency since 1976.

News Release

Awareness is Key to Recognizing Mental Illnesses and Seeking Treatment

Mental Illness Awareness Week is October 5-11, 2008

Camden, NJ (October 10, 2008) – As with any illness, the earlier mental health disorders are diagnosed, the sooner treatment can begin and the more effective it can be. Teachers, friends, parents and other relatives need to recognize the signs of mental illnesses, so that they can take the critical steps toward receiving proper diagnoses and appropriate treatment.

Early treatment for mental illness can prevent family crises and reduce the amount of emergency department admissions every year. Consequently, access to mental health services is a principal concern for providers such as the Hispanic Family Center (HFC). Recognizing this need, HFC continues to advocate for better care of persons needing mental health treatment. One of the primary obstacles to accessing services is the lack of culturally and linguistically competent staff. Other barriers include the many cases of mental illness that go undiagnosed as well as the growing number of uninsured or underinsured who don't seek treatment. There are, however, providers, such as HFC, who deliver low cost or free mental health services to the public in English and Spanish.

“While Mental Illness Awareness Week (October 5-11, 2008) is a prime opportunity to educate the public about these illnesses and the services available, it is equally important to focus on the value and impact of services,” said Hispanic Family Center Executive Director, Elsa Candelario. The Family Counseling Clinic at HFC offers an outpatient mental health program for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness. The program provides a full array of case management interventions coupled with individual and group counseling services. Since its inception, the program has enabled many consumers to not only manage their symptoms, but also pursue and achieve other goals, such as education, careers and improved relationships. While others have gone on to take positive steps towards improving their physical health as well.

“Clearly, these services have a proven capability of transforming people's lives—regardless of the type of mental illness they have and regardless of their age. With knowledge of these success stories and of the potential that many others with mental illnesses have to achieve similar successes, everyone should do whatever it takes to ensure there are no barriers to receiving these services,” said Candelario.

The Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey is a multi-service agency dedicated to providing the community with a broad range of culturally relevant social services and advocacy programs that promote and encourage empowerment and self-sufficiency. To meet this goal the Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey offers over 30 programs including after school programs, employment and training programs, health education and prevention services, mental health services, senior services and substance abuse treatment. Each year the Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey serves over 6,000 individuals and families.

###

Contact: Vanessa Maria Graber, MA
Director of Development and Communications
vgraber@hispanicfamilycenter.com

Signs of Mental Illnesses

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

- Six months or more of chronic, exaggerated worry and tension that is unfounded or much more severe than the normal anxiety most people experience
- Expecting the worst
- Excessive worrying about money, health, family or work, even when there are no signs of trouble
- Inability to relax
- Insomnia
- Physical symptoms, such as fatigue, trembling, muscle tension, headaches, irritability or hot flashes

Depression: Two weeks or more of any of the following symptoms:

- Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Reduced appetite and weight loss, or increased appetite and weight gain
- Loss of pleasure and interest in once-enjoyable activities, including sex
- Restlessness, irritability
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as chronic pain or digestive disorders
- Difficulty concentrating at work or at school, or difficulty remembering things or making decisions
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless
- Thoughts of suicide or death

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder consists of symptoms of mania alternating with symptoms of depression. Symptoms of mania which can last up to three months if untreated, include:

- Excessive energy, activity, restlessness, racing thoughts and rapid talking
- Denial that anything is wrong
- Extreme "high" or euphoric feelings
- Easily irritated or distracted.
- Decreased need for sleep
- Unrealistic beliefs in one's ability
- Uncharacteristically poor judgment
- Drug abuse

Schizophrenia

- Hearing or seeing something that isn't there
- A constant feeling of being watched

- Deterioration of academic or work performance
- A change in personal hygiene and appearance
- A change in personality or bizarre behavior
- Increasing withdrawal from social situations
- Irrational, angry or fearful response to loved ones
- Inability to sleep or concentrate