



# Depression

As part of a comprehensive research agenda aimed at advancing the care of Veterans with depression, VA researchers are developing, testing, and implementing new models of primary care; studying ways to improve outcomes among Veterans affected by depression along with other conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, or hepatitis C; and exploring the genetic and molecular roots of the condition, with the goal of developing more effective medications.

## Examples of VA Research Advances

**Managing depression in those with heart failure** – A new study led by Dr. John Rumsfeld at the Denver VA is testing a new model of heart-failure care. The key is multidisciplinary teams that include primary care doctors, cardiologists, and psychiatrists. Careful management of depression is a key part of the project, since research has suggested that depression may aggravate or bring on heart disease.

**Identifying higher-risk periods for suicide** – A team with VA and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor studied the records of nearly 888,000 Veterans who were treated for depression between 1999 and 2004. The goal was to tease out from the data whether there are periods of greater risk for suicide. The study found that patients were at the highest risk following psychiatric hospitalizations and after starting antidepressant therapy. (It was not clear whether medication raised the risk or was just a marker for more severe illness.) Veterans aged 61 to 80 had the highest risk of any age group. VA has a comprehensive suicide-prevention campaign, including a hotline at 800-273-TALK.

**Depression common in kidney disease** – Doctors know depression is common among patients with end-stage renal failure who are on dialysis. But is it equally common in those with milder forms of kidney disease? The answer is yes, according to a study at the Dallas VA and University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. Medical interviews with 272 patients with varying stages of chronic kidney disease revealed a 20-percent prevalence rate, regardless of disease stage.

## Facts About Depression

Depression is one of the most common and costly mental disorders. Depression costs the U.S. an estimated \$66 billion per year, which includes both direct health care costs and indirect costs, such as lost work days. Veterans with depression account for slightly more than 14 percent of total VA health care costs. While there are effective pharmacologic treatments and psychotherapies for depression, studies show that the condition is underdiagnosed. An untreated episode of depression may last several months, and most people with depression experience repeated episodes over their lifetime.

