

News RELEASE

American Psychiatric Association, 1000 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 1825, Arlington, VA 22209

For Information Contact:

Nancy Trenti, 703-907-8644

ntrenti@psych.org

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Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW) Annual Symposium

Addresses Psychological Dimensions of Trauma

Arlington, VA – The American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), co-sponsors of Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW), vowed to continue their focus on important issues affecting the mentally ill during the annual MIAW Congressional symposium, which was held October 1. This year's symposium, "Psychological and Biological Effects of Trauma: Who's Vulnerable and Who's Not," addressed the effects of terrorism, disaster and other stressors on mental health, and how advances in research and treatment bolster the need for mental health parity legislation.

James H. Scully, Jr., M.D., APA medical director, welcomed the attendees, which included Members of Congress, their staff, as well as representatives from federal agencies and allied advocacy groups. He told attendees that "we are here to decrease prejudice and stigma – we do that by learning and educating. It is amazing that prejudice and discrimination still occur when today's scientific research is at the cutting edge."

Members of Congress attendees – including Reps. Phil Gingrey, M.D. (R-GA), Rush Holt (D-NJ), Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), and Tim Murphy (R-PA) – praised co-sponsors APA and NAMI, the speakers, and attendees for raising awareness and helping to eliminate stigma about mental health issues.

The symposium moderator Herbert Pardes, M.D., President and CEO of New York Presbyterian Hospital System, noted that the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks helped heighten awareness of mental illness, and he pointed out the need for a prepared mental health response to traumatic events.

In his keynote address, Dennis Charney, M.D., Chief of the Mood and Anxiety Disorders Program at the National Institute of Mental Health, discussed scientific advances in psychiatric research with an emphasis on the physiology of resilience. Neurobiological research shows that specific genes that may demonstrate resiliency can now be defined. Dr. Charney cited terrorism, last year's Washington area sniper attacks and the recent Northeast power failure as traumatic events that demonstrate the need for early intervention to treat mental disorders resulting from posttraumatic stress disorder.

Richard C. Birkel, Ph.D., President of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, stressed the importance of representing the public in an effort to promote diagnosis and treatment. Ramiro Guevara, National Director of NAMI's "In Our Own Voice" Consumer Affairs Team, said that recovery from mental illness is possible and that reducing stigma is critical to mental health efforts.

The Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW) Symposium was established to focus on timely issues affecting the mentally ill, those who care for and about them, and to highlight research advances in prevention, treatment, and diagnosis of mental illness. MIAW will be observed from October 5-11, 2003.

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society, founded in 1844, whose 38,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. For more information, visit the American Psychiatric Association web site at www.psych.org.

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