

For Information Contact:

Lydia Sermons-Ward, 703-907-8640

press@psych.org

Jessica Mikulski, 703-907-8562

jmikulski@psych.org**For Immediate Release:**

September 30, 2005

Release No. 05-57

2005 Storm Season Underscores Importance of Mental Health*“APA Raises Awareness During Mental Illness Awareness Week”*

Arlington, Va. – Depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress. These are common mental health disorders that may impact many individuals and families who are working to recover from the devastating aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and other recent major disasters, underscoring the importance of Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW) this year.

MIAW, which will be observed Oct. 2-8, 2005, by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), patient advocacy organizations and other mental health providers, is an opportunity to raise public awareness of mental disorders and resources available for care and treatment. The theme of MIAW this year is *Leveling the Playing Field*, to ensure that those who need care receive care.

“The more devastating and terrifying the trauma, the higher the risk for developing symptoms of disorders such as depression or anxiety,” said APA president Steven S. Sharfstein, M.D. “Now more than ever, it is important for individuals and families to understand the importance of seeking treatment for common and severe mental disorders, and that treatment works for these disorders.”

Aspects of a disaster that increase the likelihood of trauma-related emotional states include: lack of warning or lack of preparation for an event, injury during the trauma, death of a loved one, exposure to horrifying events, experiencing the trauma alone and the possibility of recurrence. Some trauma-related reactions are transient and may resolve. However, prolonged symptoms may require evaluation and treatment by a mental health provider.

Expert psychiatrists are available to the media to discuss mental health concerns, treatments and the impact of disasters on mental health. Requests for interviews should be directed to 703-907-8640 or press@psych.org. Mental health resources and more information on common mental illnesses and MIAW are available to the public on APA’s consumer Web site, www.healthyminds.org. For more information and resources on relief and recovery efforts related to Hurricane Katrina and other disasters, visit APA’s Disaster Psychiatry Web site www.psych.org/disasterpsych/.

Mental Illness Awareness Week is an annual observance created by the APA and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), a patient advocacy organization, to raise public awareness on mental illnesses and the effectiveness of treatment, and to combat mental illness stigma. For more information on MIAW, visit NAMI’s Web site www.nami.org/miaw.

Bipolar Awareness Day and *National Depression Screening Day* will also be observed on Oct. 6, 2005.

About the American Psychiatric Association:

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose more than 36,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Public outreach during MIAW is a component of APA’s “*Healthy Minds. Healthy Lives.*” public information campaign to raise awareness on mental health issues. Visit APA at www.psych.org and www.healthyminds.org.