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Sept. 11, 2007

Release No. 07 - 67

September 11 Tragedy Linked to Ongoing Mental Health Concerns

Arlington, Va. – As the country recognizes the sixth anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the continuing mental health consequences of the trauma still linger today. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) joins with the many Americans who will participate in ceremonies remembering those who were lost and commemorating those who became heroes in the rescue and recovery efforts.

“Six years later, the overwhelming impact of these tragic events still evokes strong emotional reactions for many people resulting in both mental and physical symptoms,” said APA President Carolyn Robinowitz, M.D. “It is a natural part of the healing process to experience feelings of sadness, anxiety or fear around such an anniversary.”

Traumatic events, like those of Sept. 11, 2001, can significantly impact individuals’ mental health. However, the majority of those who go through such an intense experience recover with no lasting mental health consequences. [New research](#) in the September 2007 *American Journal of Psychiatry* underlines the link between the length and intensity of exposure at the World Trade Center site and the development of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other anxiety disorders by rescue and recovery workers.

The report, “Differences in PTSD Prevalence and Associated Risk Factors Among World Trade Center Disaster Rescue and Recovery Workers,” concluded that approximately 20 percent of construction/engineering personnel and unaffiliated volunteers were likely to develop PTSD within two to three years, compared with only six percent of police officers. The likelihood of developing PTSD was higher for three groups of rescuers: those who started working at the site on or immediately after Sept. 11; those who worked on site for longer periods of time; and those who were injured while working at the site. The findings of this study establish a substantial risk of mental health repercussions in volunteers who respond to disasters, including terrorist attacks.

For individuals who are vulnerable to anxiety and depression, the APA cautions against overexposure to news rebroadcasts of the events. For those who have contact with children, keep open dialogues with them regarding their fears of danger and disaster.

"If you find that your ability to function at work or at home is impaired, or you are having difficulty coping with your feelings, seek help sooner than later. As with all illnesses, delay means more suffering and more severe symptoms. Remember, treatment works," said Dr. Robinowitz.

Free information is available to the public through the APA’s consumer Web site, www.HealthyMinds.org, including fact sheets on [posttraumatic stress disorder](#), [depression](#) and [anxiety disorders](#). Additional information is available on the APA’s Committee on Psychiatric Dimensions of Disaster’s Web page, www.psych.org/disasterpsych.

About the American Psychiatric Association:

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose more than 38,000 physician members specialize in diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at www.psych.org and www.HealthyMinds.org.