

## DEPRESSION



by Donald Victorson, CLU

### UNDERWRITER:

Defined as someone sitting  
in an ivory tower 900 miles  
from here, trained to say,  
"NO."

### YOUR JOB:

To convince that  
underwriter, with truthful  
information, presented in  
as favorable a light as  
possible that it is desirable,  
even possible to say  
"YES."

- Depression is an illness, just as diabetes and coronary disease are illnesses.
- Depression is an illness that affects the entire body, not just the mind.
- Depression will afflict one in five people during their lifetime.
- Depression is the leading cause of alcoholism, drug and other forms of substance abuse.
- Depression can be successfully treated in more than 80% of the cases of people who suffer from it.
- Depression affects all ages, all races, all economic groups, and both genders. Women, however suffer from depression twice as frequently as men do.
- Depression goes untreated in at least 50% of the people suffering from it.
- Depression untreated is the leading cause of suicide.
- Depression is second only to heart disease in causing loss of time from work in America.

- Depression is NOT something to be ashamed of.
- Depression is NOT the same as feeling "blue."
- Depression is NOT a character flaw or sign of weakness.
- Depression is NOT something you can "snap out of," any more than you can snap out of high blood pressure.
- Depression is NOT well recognized as an illness by most health care providers or insurance companies. Benefits are severely limited under most health insurance plans.

### IN ORDER TO EVALUATE THE INSURABILITY OF SOMEONE WITH DEPRESSION YOU NEED TO ASK THE FOLLOWING IMPORTANT QUESTIONS:

*When was the client initially diagnosed with depression?*

Depression can involve a short-term episode related to a stressful event such as the loss of a loved one, business setback, or loss of a job, to a prolonged illness requiring years of therapy and medication. It is extremely important to determine when the client was first diagnosed as being depressed, and how long treatment continued.

*Has the client ever been hospitalized for depression?*

Frequently the initial crisis that prompted the diagnosis will lead to a short period of hospitalization. The fact that the client underwent hospitalization for depression does not mean that you should expect a worse underwriting outcome. It is important to document the exact dates of hospital confinement, and the duration of treatment.

*What medications are currently being taken?*

There are a wide variety of medications that are used to treat depression. It is extremely important to document all medications being taken with their dosages. *What type of follow-up care is the client receiving?*

Clients who have close follow-up care with a mental health professional are much more likely to experience a favorable medical and therefore underwriting outcome. Those who avoid follow-up care are much less likely to be successful in their recovery and are therefore much less likely to obtain a favorable underwriting offer.

*What lifestyle changes has the client made to help improve their chances of successfully managing their depression?*

It is important to document lifestyle changes that have improved the client's life in a positive manner. This will frequently include ending a dysfunctional relationship, resolving fears and guilts, changing jobs or locale, getting involved in new activities, or discovering new spiritual meaning.

**Note:** It is extremely important to document the lifestyle changes the client has made as part of the management of their depression.

The underwriter, while concerned that the client has suffered depression, is more concerned with "recovery."

Is treatment still ongoing? Is the environment that contributed to the depression still present? Has there been measurable improvement? Is the client suicidal?

A good cover letter, from you, the agent, is always helpful. This is especially true in cases involving mental illness. Get into the habit of writing good cover letters to your underwriters. Your results will improve dramatically and your clients will thank you.