

**Statement by Sue Bergeson, President
The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)
To the Food and Drug Administration Neurological Devices Panel of the
Medical Devices Advisory Committee
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As the nations' largest peer-directed mental health advocacy organization, the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) has a vested interest in the development of new and emerging technologies to aid in the recovery of the millions of Americans living with mental illness—specifically the more than 34 million Americans living with depression.

We are no longer content to allow others to define our illness and our options. At DBSA we are actively engaged in advocating for greater access to new treatments and a quality of care and investment afforded other illnesses. To that end, we enthusiastically submit this written testimony on behalf of all of those who are seeking hope and the promise of recovery.

It is critical that we all understand the real impact of this illness, not only for individuals, but also for families, communities, businesses and the overall economy. Depression can and does have a devastating impact on society as a whole, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to ensuring that it is acknowledged as an illness that deserves serious attention on multiple levels.

Depression is Deadly.

Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death among persons of all ages in the United States. More than 30,000 people will die from suicide each year and a staggering 730,000 people will attempt suicide. Research has shown that more than 90 percent of people who die by suicide have suffered from a major depressive illness.

Worldwide, one million people commit suicide and as many as 20 million others try to do so each year, reflecting the unmet need for treatment, the lack of help and the worldwide stigma surrounding depression and mental illness.

The Social Impact of Depression.

Depression is a devastating illness that has social implications with significant consequences. And only those of us who live with this deep, dark illness truly understand the impact it has and will have on the rest of our lives. Although mental illness is a complex topic, the prevalence of mental illness and its consequences can no longer be overlooked.

Depression not only affects the individual suffering from the illness, but also the surrounding community: families, friends and marital and other relationships, as well. Depression in a loved one is a major source of pain and suffering for

everyone. The illness also has significant impact on children, affecting a child's development, academic achievement and social well being. Therefore, effectively treating depression may not only lead to benefits for the individual, but also have an important impact on others in the family and in the community.

Depression is Disabling and Expensive.

Depression is the of leading cause of disability in the United States and according to the World Health Organization by the year 2020, depression will be the leading cause of disability worldwide.

The burden of mental illness on health and productivity in the United States and throughout the world has long been underestimated. Data developed by the massive *Global Burden of Disease* study conducted by the World Health Organization, the World Bank, and Harvard University, reveal that mental illness, including suicide, accounts for over 15 percent of the burden of disease in established market economies, such as the United States. This is more than the disease burden caused by all cancers.

In a recent landmark report, the *State of Depression in America*, it is estimated that the depression costs over \$80 billion annually. A result of more days of disability, lost workdays and in non-productive time or "presenteeism," a newly coined phrase that describes individuals that show up for work but are too sick to be productive. All of this places a large financial burden on employers. And as more people receive treatment, insurance companies are also faced with increasing costs including hospitalization and outpatient treatment.

Federal and state programs are becoming increasingly stretched by the cost of mental illness. Programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and criminal justice and community-based state mental health programs are being minimized as the need grows for treatment. Families can also be faced with financial strain, based on the severity of the illness and the need for care.

The Lack of Real Progress.

Despite increased interest and advocacy for the illness in the recent years, there has been little progress. Changes in care such as prevention, recovery methods and improving the quality of life of those living with depression are not happening quickly enough and are not having a large enough impact on the lives of these individuals.

Public stigma, misunderstanding of the illness and an extremely complex system of care have all combined to create significant challenges for accessing even adequate treatments.

Because depression is a complex and serious medical condition, new and improved treatments and the development of new technologies to aid in the recovery of the millions of Americans are vital. This is especially important because more than 80 percent of people with depression do improve with appropriate treatment.

In conclusion, depression is a devastating and life-threatening illness, but one that can be prevented and can be treated. Access to quality treatments is fundamental to the health and well being of all Americans. If the current barriers and challenges to treatment and recovery are addressed, the majority of people with depression can live productive and satisfying lives.

Due to the pervasive misperceptions and stigma surrounding these illnesses, people living with mental illness are already at a disadvantage. For those living with these life-threatening illnesses, very few efficacious treatment options have been made available over the past decade. DBSA believes that the roadblocks to treatment and quality care must be removed so that people living with depression, bipolar disorder and other mental illnesses can achieve full and sustainable recoveries.

DBSA appreciates and supports this committee's efforts to evaluate and bring to market new and emerging technologies that are proven safe and effective in improving the lives of people with mental illness.