

Happy Holidays to  
you and yours!

Think Peace

Act Lovingly

Live Joyously

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**OWH Mission**

*To improve the health status of women in Los Angeles County by providing education and promoting resources, programs and policies that are helpful and responsive to women, and increasing access to culturally competent, comprehensive health services.*

# Office of Women's Health



Celebrating the Mind, Body, Spirit & Diversity of Women

Volume I, Issue 3

Holiday Edition

December 2007

## Celebrating the Holidays Healthy & Stress Free

Holiday gatherings, special foods, temptations to indulge and financial constraints: along with the cheer, for many the holiday season also brings with it seasonal blues. Celebrating often leads to overeating and stress which in turn can lead to many other social, physical, and psychological problems. Fortunately, many of these problems can be minimized by utilizing a few simple tips to celebrate the holidays in a healthy and stress free way!

### Holiday Stress

For many, it is difficult enough to stay calm and relaxed daily let alone during the holiday season. With

everything going on, it almost seems impossible to find ways to relax and de-stress. As difficult as it may seem, however, it is extremely important to find those ways. Your health depends on it. There are many ways to handle stress. Taking time to relax, sleeping, eating healthy, keeping expectations for the holiday season manageable and realistic and spending time with friends and family are just a few ways to handle stress during the holiday season. **Continued on page 4**

*Find ways to relax and de-stress... your health depends on it!*

## 4 Things In 5 Minutes!

### Four quick tips for relaxing on the spot

1. **Breathe deeply** - Take several deep breaths to slow down your heart rate and reduce anxiety.
2. **Relax your muscles** - Stretch your neck, stand or sit up straight to get some of the tension out of your body.
3. **Make a change** - Step back from what you're doing and/or what's stressing you.
4. **Laugh** - Nothing relieves the tension in your body or your mind like a little humor.

## 2007 Women's Health Policy Summit

### Building Multicultural Women's Health: Setting an Agenda for Los Angeles

*Thank you* to our many community partners who participated in the May 24<sup>th</sup> Summit convened by the OWH and collaborating organizations!

Over 400 healthcare stakeholders attended the all-day event and developed priority recommendations in 10 focus areas: Healthy Aging; Reproductive Health & the Environment; Universal Healthcare; Adolescence & Healthy Relationships; Immigrant Women & Health; Violence



(L) A workgroup discusses women's health issues. (R) Morning Panel on "Achieving Equitable Health."

& Health; Racism, Multiculturalism & Health; Healthy Lifestyles & Chronic Disease Prevention; Disability & Access; and Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity.

The Summit featured a panel

discussion on 'Achieving Equitable Health,' and a Listening Panel of funders and policymakers. Keynote speaker Vivian Pinn, MD, Director, NIH Office of Research on Women's Health, spoke on the

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## Depression and Women's Health

### Interview with Elena Farias, Ph.D.



*Depression affects approximately 11% of women in Los Angeles County. Even though it can be effectively managed with psychotherapy and medication, evidence suggests it often is not adequately diagnosed or treated. Depression often co-occurs with other illnesses like heart disease and diabetes and if left untreated, it can lead to eating disorders, addictions and suicide. The OWH talked with Dr. Elena Farias, Program Head of the Adult Outpatient Programs and Urgent Community Care Center at Augustus F. Hawkins Mental Health Center at the LAC Department of Mental Health, about depression and women's health.*

#### What is depression?

Clinical depression is a profound issue that affects many parts of functioning. The degree of impairment associated with major depression varies, but even in mild cases, there must be either clinically significant distress or some interference in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. If impairment is severe, the person may lose the ability to function socially or occupationally. In extreme cases, the person may be unable to perform

*Depression could be related to a...situational change in life.*

minimal self care such as feeding or clothing self, or to maintain minimal personal hygiene. Sleeping and eating can be affected, interest in pleasurable activities can be significantly reduced, and we can become isolated from the people that we are normally connected to.

#### Is there a difference between depression and being sad?

Yes. In order to make the distinction and get a clear clinical picture, it's very important to ask a woman

what "feeling depressed" or "feeling sad" means to her. What do you mean you "feel the blues?" What do you mean you feel "down in the dumps?" Clinicians should not make assumptions. A woman could be minimizing her depression by saying, "I'm in a funk." And if you just listen to that, on the surface it sounds like she's just going through something a little difficult. Well, not necessarily. It's important to have her tell us what that means to her so that we make sure that a thorough assessment is completed.

*Depression can affect so many different parts of our lives.*

Depression could be related to a physical cause or a biochemical imbalance or be related to a situational change in her life, like her children have moved away or her partner has retired or she has retired.

#### Why is the impact of depression so profound?

Depression can affect so many different parts of our lives and it can also impact many people in our lives. There can be many underlying, contributing factors, for example,

**Continued on page 3**

## Ask The Doctor...

### Can depression be the reason my eating habits have changed?



**Rita Singhal, MD, MPH**  
OWH Medical Director

*If you have a question for Ask the Doctor, please submit it to [jtjohn@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:jtjohn@ph.lacounty.gov)*

Depression can cause a spectrum of symptoms including a change in eating habits. There can be a decline in appetite associated with a significant weight loss that can lead to illness. More commonly, depression is associated with an increase in appetite and weight gain. Depressed individuals are more inclined to eat foods that are starchy and sweet, commonly termed as 'comfort food.' However, the comfort derived from these types of foods is short-lived and leads to a tendency to overeat. In addition to a change in eating habits, symptoms of depression include:

- Persistent sad, anxious or empty mood
- Sleep disturbances
- Loss of pleasure and interest in activities once enjoyed
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless
- Restlessness or irritability

If you have several of these symptoms, please see your doctor right away to be evaluated for clinical depression. Depression is a treatable illness, with almost 80% of people who seek treatment showing improvement in their symptoms.

**Depression Cont. from page 2**

physical reasons, perimenopausal reasons, hormonal reasons that contribute to women feeling depressed. These are things that need to be considered. Women can present with depression and when you spend the time and develop a trusting relationship, then you really begin to help the woman identify what really is going on. Part of why the impact is so profound is because it can make us feel worthless, powerless, guilty, creating an inability to think, make decisions, frequently there may be thoughts of death, suicidal ideation, or suicide attempts.

*Women have been socialized to be the strong ones for their families.*

**What stops women from getting the help they need?**

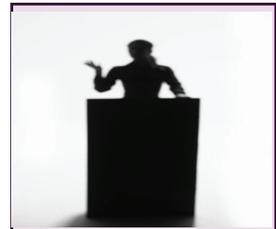
Stigma is often a barrier to women being able to acknowledge pain and accept help. Culturally and socially, it's hard for women to say, "I'm depressed." Some of that has to do with being socialized as caretakers. We are socialized to take care of children, our grandchildren, our spouses, and our parents. Because we have been socialized in that way, it can be very difficult for us as women to say something is not ok with me and let me go get some help for myself. Instead we keep pushing through it, often overeating or drinking or masking it in

ways that are very detrimental to our selves and our families. For immigrant women and women of color, there is a lot of shame in admitting depression. And for many African-American and Latina women, we have been socialized that we have to be strong, that we need to be the strong ones in the family for the children and for our partners. Mental health needs are often seen as weakness.

**What is role conflict?**

If my primary role that I have been handed is to be the strong woman and the pillar of the family, then if I'm depressed, am I still strong and valuable to my family? And if I'm questioning my strength, what happens to my

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**OWH Speakers' Bureau**

Providing our community partners with speakers on women's health issues for large or small audiences.

**Women's Health: Knowledge Is Power!**

~

Do you need a speaker for **January**, Cervical Cancer Awareness Month or **February**, Heart Month?

Contact

*Esther A. McDowell*

626-569-3823 or

[emcdowell@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:emcdowell@ph.lacounty.gov)



**Spotlight on our Community Partners  
Venice Family Clinic**



The Venice Family Clinic is an all-inclusive primary health care facility dedicated to providing free, quality health care to people in need. They cater to low-income women, men, children, teens and seniors who lack private health insurance. The clinic was founded in 1970 by Philip Rossaman, M.D. and co-founder Mayer Davidson, M.D. It has grown from a small storefront operation into the largest free clinic in the

country. Currently, a total of 2,402 individuals, including 519 physicians, donate their time.

The Venice Family Clinic provides primary health care such as medications, diagnosis, treatment and laboratory tests. They also perform health screenings and immunizations to help prevent the onset of disease.

Some of the more specialized services are prenatal care, HIV/AIDS prevention, testing and treatment, homeless

healthcare, domestic violence intervention, psychiatric counseling, and child development.

Venice Family Clinic's vision is to improve the health of people and communities through accessible, quality healthcare.

Medical Director Karen Lamp, MD and her dedicated, trained staff are realizing their vision by providing a health, wellness and integrative medicine program at a free clinic.

**"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."**

~ Anne Frank ~

**Depression Cont. from page**

identity? It has a domino effect, a ripple effect through our lives, that can then call into question who I am as a person, my self-worth and my value to my people, to my family and to my community.

**Is access to care a problem for women of color?**

Sometimes the way Latinas present depression is by somaticizing - by saying my stomach hurts or my back hurts or my head hurts. So,

*Latinas will not just open up and talk about feeling depressed because of the social stigma of mental illness.*

they're presenting with a physical problem. It is important for the primary provider to spend some time to get more information and a clear sense of what else is going on. Latinas will not just open up and talk about feeling depressed because of the social stigma of mental illness. Unless I feel that you are genuine, sensitive and respectful of me and you speak my language then I will be more comfortable communicating, then I might think about telling you my story.

**What is the best way to treat depression?**

It is extremely important to seek professional help. A thorough clinical evaluation will determine the type of treatment that is necessary. Research tells us that treatment is much more successful if when prescribing medication, therapy is also included. Some women don't need medication. Some women just need a referral to a therapist. It really is a case-by-case basis.

*Depression doesn't mean that you are less of a woman.*

Not to wait. It's ok to go see a professional just to "check things out." Don't wait until the symptoms are severe. Depression doesn't mean that you are less of a woman. It doesn't mean that you are less valuable to your family. Sometimes it is easier for women to see a professional when it is framed as something that is important to do for the children or for the family. "If you don't do this, then you won't be of much help to your family because the part of you that does not feel well cannot be there for them."

**What do women need to know about depression?**



**ABCs Women of Courage: Dr. Yaga Szlachcic and Cynthia Toussaint**

Each October, ABC-TV along with 11 partnering organizations including the OWH focuses on women's health with special programming and the development of the ABCs of Women's Health booklet in English and Spanish. One of the highlights is the Women of Courage awards luncheon profiling providers and women in the community

who are making a difference in women's health. The OWH is proud to have selected as 2007 honorees Yaga Szlachcic, MD, Chief of the Cardiology Program at Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center, and Cynthia Toussaint, Founder of "For Grace," a nonprofit organization devoted to ensuring the ethical and equal treatment of all women in pain.

**Dr. Yaga Szlachcic** is on the cutting-edge of research on heart disease, the number one killer of women, with vast research experience with women with disabilities. Working as a physician, researcher, and educator, Dr Szlachcic is making a significant difference in raising



awareness of the health issues of disabled women, seeking improved methods of treatment, and providing quality care to patients in the aftermath of severely disabling illness and injury.

**Cynthia Toussaint**, a former ballerina, suffered continuous and tortuous pain that began 25 years ago after a simple ballet injury. Compounding the pain was

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**Healthy Holidays Cont. from pg 1**

**Healthy Holidays**

Cakes, cookies, candies galore! The holidays offer a wide range of sweet treats and scrumptious meals. Though eating healthy may seem like another impossible task during the holidays it too can be managed with a few simple changes. Consume smaller portions,

*Consume smaller portions.*

avoid arriving at parties with an empty stomach and try to adjust recipes with low-fat/low-calorie substitutions. For example, replace regular flour with whole grain or whole wheat flour, substitute dried fruits for candied fruits and honey for corn syrup. If your recipe permits, use two egg whites in place of one egg

and applesauce in place of some of the fat. What about the notorious holiday eggnog? Healthier alternatives of this seasonal beverage are also available such as low-fat eggnog, soy eggnog and sugar-free eggnog. If these options are not available at the local grocery store, you can make your own or mix any store-bought eggnog with

*Give yourself the gift of a healthy, stress-free self!*

evaporated fat free milk. There are many ways to celebrate the holidays without compromising your health. Make health conscious decisions, take some time to relax and at the end of the holidays, you'll give yourself the best gift of all: a healthy and stress-free self!

## — Office of Women's Health in Action —

### Human Trafficking: *Implications for Women and their Health*

On October 10<sup>th</sup> the OWH and the Iris Cantor-UCLA Women's Health Education & Resource Center hosted an educational forum for community leaders on the growing issue of human trafficking, highlighting the magnitude of the problem worldwide and in L.A. County.

Trafficking is the recruitment and/or the transportation of persons using violence, deception or coercion for the purpose of exploiting them for economic profit or sexual advantage.

Human trafficking is currently the third largest international criminal enterprise after drugs and arms trafficking and has become a \$9 billion-a-year global industry.



(L) OWH's Ellen Eidem (4th from L) with some of the speakers and participants. (R) UCLA's Dr. Janet Pregler moderates the panel.

Every 10 minutes, a man, woman or child is trafficked into the US for forced labor.

They are all ages and educational levels and are trafficked from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Russia, and Eastern Europe.

The CIA estimates there are 50,000 people trafficked into the US *every* year.

Often recruited for a job with the promise of a better life, their passports are taken

upon arriving in the country and they are held as slaves working to pay off the 'debt' of bringing them in.

It is estimated that one third of victims have to seek healthcare at some point. Providers need to know how to identify and assist them.

Denise Dador, Health Reporter for ABC-7 Eyewitness News, was the Mistress of Ceremonies for this special forum.

Speakers included award-winning investigative journalist Peter Landesman; Kay Buck, Executive Director of the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST); Dr. Susie Baldwin, Chief of the Health Assessment Unit in the LAC Dept of Public Health, and Terri Thorfinnson, Chief of the California Office of Women's Health.

Florencia, a human trafficking survivor, gave powerful testimony to the need for action.

*For more information on human trafficking, visit [www.castla.org](http://www.castla.org)*

### Public Health's Most Outstanding Employee: *Jessica St. John*



Jessica is pictured with Dr. Jonathan Fielding, Director of the Dept. of Public Health (L) and Dr. John Schunhoff, Chief Deputy Director (R).

Jessica St. John, OWH Special Projects Manager, was named Public Health's *Most Outstanding Employee* at the Employee Recognition Luncheon on November 15th. Jessica has been with the OWH since its inception in 1998 and is passionate about women's health.

Over the past year, in addition to many other special projects, she coordinated the 2007 Women's Health Policy Summit.

#### **Courage Cont. from page 4**

the fact that doctors claimed that it was "all in her head."

After a long, disabling 13 years, her condition was finally diagnosed as Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy (RSD), a chronic neurological disease which develops in response to an event that the body regards as traumatic.

Today, wheelchair-bound, Cynthia champions awareness of the gender bias toward women in pain worldwide. She is active in the arenas of public

speaking, mass media communications, and political advocacy.

In her own words, "I never again want what happened to me to happen to another."



Cynthia Toussaint

*For more information, visit: [www.forgence.org](http://www.forgence.org)*

~ **OWH Staff** ~

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**Monica Macias**

**Bertha Rocha**

**Elaine Yep**

**Interns**

**Andres Campaz**

**Ariel Chen**

**Lauren McLemore**

**Brian O'Connor**

**Charmi Shah**

**Carmen Zapata**



Seasons Greetings! ★

The Office of Women's Health would like to wish everyone a happy, healthy and safe holiday season!

**Summit Cont. from page 1**

advances in women's health and what the future holds.

Recommendations from the Summit have been compiled into an executive report and are intended to help drive research, policy and funding aimed at eliminating health disparities among low-income, uninsured women and women of color.

The OWH is currently working with the Summit

Leadership Task Force to develop a plan for implementing the recommendations.

The task force is composed of Summit workgroup leaders, planning committee members, OWH Women's Health Policy Council, key community stakeholders and OWH staff. If interested in participating, please contact the OWH.

**Available online!**

- ◇ *The Executive Report and Recommendations*
- ◇ *Powerpoint presentations on the ten priority areas*
- ◇ *Abstracts from Promising & Innovative Practices highlighted at the Summit*

[lapublichealth.org/owh](http://lapublichealth.org/owh)  
or  
[preventionmatters.org](http://preventionmatters.org)

**Prevention Matters!**

*Prevention Matters!* is OWH's multi-lingual, multi-cultural umbrella campaign that addresses general preventive health for women with an emphasis on heart disease, the #1 killer.

Working together with community partners, the goal is to reduce the burden of chronic disease among low-income women by:

- eliminating disparities in access, utilization and quality of care;
- promoting awareness and

education on living a healthier lifestyle;

- increasing access to screenings, treatment, and establishing a medical home; and
- promoting advocacy and policy opportunities.

Working together with our community partners, we can make a healthier LA.

Prevention Matters!

**OWH Mobile Clinic Outreach Program**

offering comprehensive health assessments at no charge to high risk, low-income women who are not able to access preventive screenings.

The mobile clinic travels 1-3 times a week to various locations throughout LA County.

Contact Esther McDowell  
[emcdowell@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:emcdowell@ph.lacounty.gov)

**OWH Website**  
[preventionmatters.org](http://preventionmatters.org)

Visit our website for multi-lingual health education materials including fact sheets, the mobile clinic schedule and community calendar, information on women's health issues and the *Prevention Matters!* campaign.