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Contact:

Jill Olds • 412.648.3301 • Oldsj@upmc.edu

Launch of World Bipolar Day

International organizations collaborate to promote global awareness of bipolar disorder

Sunday 30 March 2014—World Bipolar Day (WBD) will be celebrating its inaugural year on March 30th, the birthday of Vincent Van Gogh, who was posthumously diagnosed as probably having bipolar disorder. The vision of WBD is to bring world awareness to bipolar disorders and eliminate social stigma. Through international collaboration the goal of World Bipolar Day is to bring the world population information about bipolar disorders that will educate and improve sensitivity towards the illness.

Bipolar Disorder is a mental illness that represents a significant challenge to patients, health care workers, family members and our communities. While growing acceptance of bipolar disorder as a medical condition, like diabetes and heart disease, has taken hold in some parts of the world, unfortunately the stigma associated with the illness is a barrier to care and continues to impede early diagnosis and effective treatment. In order to address the disparity in how bipolar disorder is viewed in different parts of the world, the Asian Network of Bipolar Disorder (ANBD), the International Bipolar Foundation (IBPF), and the International Society for Bipolar Disorders (ISBD) came together to work on the concept of a world bipolar day.

Willem Nolen, current President of the ISBD, shares his enthusiasm about this initiative

"When the ANBD, who came up with the idea, approached the ISBD we immediately decided that we should support it actively. The initiative helps to achieve our goals to improve the lives of bipolar patients and their relatives. We immediately invited the IBPF to join in the initiative and are excited to work with such a great group of organizations. I am confident that World Bipolar Day will grow in the upcoming years and will help reduce stigma."

Muffy Walker, Founder and President of IBPF, said the following when asked why she felt it important to be involved with WBD,

"As Martin Luther King once said, I have a dream that one day our nations will rise up and create all men equal. And I have a dream that my son, who has lived most of his life with bipolar disorder, will one day live in a nation where he will not be judged by his illness, but rather by the content of his character. I believe that World Bipolar Day will help bring my dream to fruition."

Manuel Sanchez de Carmona, ISBD President-Elect, believes that

“WBD is an excellent opportunity for us [ISBD members] to reach out to patients, families and advocacy groups to invite them to work together on this global project to sensitize and bring awareness to bipolar disorders. WBD is a platform to think global and act local – our vision will be attained with a motivated and strong local effort.”

It is estimated that the global prevalence of bipolar disorder is between 1 and 2% and has been said to be as high as 5% and, according to the World Health Organization, is the 6th leading cause of disability in the world. In order to address this global problem, we need a global solution. With support from leading experts from around the world, groups like ANBD, IBPF, and ISBD are supporting efforts to investigate biological causes, targets for drug treatment, better treatments, better methods of diagnosis, the genetic components of the illness, and strategies for living well with bipolar disorder and this is just the beginning. Collaborations between research and advocacy groups are continuing to grow, and WBD is a tribute to the success of this strategy.

Christine Saenz, a patient and blogger, explains,

“I am so excited about this project and its message. It is so important to educate the world and fight the stigma that is associated with mental illness. Bipolar does not have to be scary. I am the face of Bipolar. I am just like everyone else. With the right treatment plan, I am able to live a stable and happy life.”

As the day draws near we encourage you to organize and publicize local events, which can be shared with the world through distribution on the WBD Facebook page (www.facebook.com/worldbipolarday). While a permanent home on the web has not yet been established, in the interim, ISBD will host your announcements on a special section of our website devoted to WBD. The WBD page will ultimately host press releases for these events, as well as provide a place to post photos, stories and share inspiration with others who share the vision of WBD.

For more information about WBD, or for any questions, comments, or event announcements, please contact Jill Olds at jillo@isbd.org

