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Treating and Preventing Adolescent Mental Health Disorders, What We Know and What We Don't Know awarded best book prize by Association of American Publishers

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Treating and Preventing Adolescent Mental Health Disorders, What We Know and What We Don't Know today was named the best book in clinical medicine published in 2005 by the Association of American Publishers, the principal trade association of the book publishing industry.

The book, aimed at mental health practitioners and researchers, is a project of the Adolescent Mental Health Initiative of the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands and the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. The publisher is Oxford University Press.

University of Pennsylvania President Amy Gutmann heralded the collaboration of scholars and scientists from Penn and around the nation. "By combining the knowledge and experience of many people in many disciplines, we have created a valuable tool that will benefit a large segment of our population, young people."

One out of 10 adolescents in the U.S. struggles with a mental health problem severe enough to cause significant impairment, according to federal estimates. Yet those on the front lines of treatment and research encounter large gaps in knowledge about the problem.

In an attempt to improve understanding, more than 100 internationally respected experts in adolescent mental health were convened by the Annenberg Adolescent Mental Health Initiative to assess what is known – and not known – about this important public health issue. The result of that dialogue among physicians, psychologists and scholars is *Treating and Preventing Adolescent Mental Health Disorders*.

Among the findings:

- Between 20 and 30 percent of adolescents report symptoms of depression. While depression once was considered an "adult" affliction, the mean age of onset today is 15.
- An estimated 1.1 million teenagers, ages 12 to 17, needed substance abuse treatment in 2001. Of that number, only 100,000 actually received it.
- Almost 9 percent of high school students have attempted suicide in the past year.

Early diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders increase the likelihood that the teenager can lead a productive adult life. And, the experts report, most prevalent adolescent disorders are treatable. But delivery of treatment is by no means assured. For example:

- Schools are the de facto mental health service delivery system for children and adolescents. But the level of services available is poor, and varies widely. Of 2,000 schools surveyed as part of this project, slightly more than half had full-time access to a mental health professional.
- Primary-care physicians – who can serve as a gateway to specialized treatment – often are inadequately trained to identify and diagnose mental health problems, according to another study conducted for the book. Many physicians expressed low confidence in their abilities to detect mental disorders among adolescents in their care.

In the introduction to *Treating and Preventing Adolescent Mental Health Disorders*, Dwight L. Evans, M.D., chief of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania Health System, and Martin E.P. Seligman, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, write that the prevention and treatment of adolescent developmental, emotional or behavioral problems are among the “major public health issues facing the United States.” Many mental disorders begin during adolescence and carry over into adulthood, leading to significant long-term impairment. Although early intervention shows promising results, it often is not available.

“Adolescent mental health in the United States is, simply put, much poorer than it ought to be,” conclude the two experts.

Through a series of reports on topics such as depression and bipolar disorder, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, substance abuse and suicide, the book serves as a guide for health professionals, researchers and policy makers.

“The reports provide a hopeful assessment of our ability to treat the most prevalent adolescent disorders,” writes Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center and program director of the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, in the conclusion of *Treating and Preventing Adolescent Mental Health Disorders*. “At the same time, enormous hurdles remain in our ability to deliver these treatments, and our knowledge base of effective treatments still has important gaps. These considerations suggest that we face formidable challenges if we wish to ensure the healthy development of our youth.”

Copies of *Treating and Preventing Adolescent Mental Health Disorders* are available to the media. Contact Joyce Garczynski at the Annenberg Public Policy Center, 3535 Market Street, Suite 200, Philadelphia, PA 19104. Telephone: (215) 898-7029 Fax: (215) 746-7848 email: jgarczynski@asc.upenn.edu

As a companion to *Treating and Preventing Adolescent Mental Health Disorders*, the Adolescent Mental Health Initiative and Oxford University Press are publishing four paperback titles aimed at parents. *If Your Adolescent Has Depression or Bipolar Disorder* and *If Your Adolescent Has an Eating Disorder* were released last year; *If Your Adolescent Has Schizophrenia* and *If your Adolescent Has an Eating Disorder* will be released in February. The Adolescent Mental Health Initiative also maintains a mental health website for teens, www.copecaredeal.org.

Seven commissions of experts collaborated on *Treating and Preventing Adolescent Mental Health Disorders*. By subject matter, the commission chairs include: Anxiety Disorders: [Edna B. Foa, Ph.D.](#); Depression and Bipolar Disorder: [Dwight L. Evans, M.D.](#); Eating Disorders: [B. Timothy Walsh, M.D.](#); Positive Youth Development: [Martin E.P. Seligman, Ph.D.](#); Schizophrenia: [Raquel E. Gur, M.D., Ph.D.](#); Substance and Alcohol Abuse: [Charles P. O'Brien, M.D., Ph.D.](#); Suicide Prevention: [Herbert Hendin, M.D.](#)