

# U-M hosts first conference on depression in students

The University of Michigan will host the nation's first major conference focused on depression in college students March 6 and 7 at the Michigan League in Ann Arbor. The event will explore current knowledge on depression and related disorders in college undergraduate and graduate students, and the best approaches for prevention, detection and treatment.

It is co-sponsored by the U-M Depression Center - the only center in the nation devoted to research, treatment and education on all forms of depression - and the U-M Rackham School of Graduate Studies.

Educators, students, researchers, mental health advocates and professionals, and the media are welcome to attend. Space is limited and registration is required; a registration fee will be charged for all participants except students and journalists.

For more information, visit [www.rackham.umich.edu/DepressionConf](http://www.rackham.umich.edu/DepressionConf) and [www.depressioncenter.org](http://www.depressioncenter.org).

Speakers will include depression experts from the U-M and other academic institutions,

## FACTS ABOUT DEPRESSION

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, approximately 18.8 million American adults, or about 9.5 percent of the nation's population age 18 and older, have a depressive disorder. Depression most often begins in late childhood, in adolescence, or in early adulthood.

Recent research on depression and suicide in college students has begun to raise the public's awareness of the issue.

For example, the American College Health Association in 2000 reported that 10 percent of college students - 32.8 percent of women and 6.2 percent of men - had been diagnosed with depression sometime in their lives. A 2002 national survey found that more than 80 percent of the 274 directors of campus counseling centers

surveyed said they thought the number of students with severe psychological disorders had risen over the last five years.

Meanwhile, a recently published study from Kansas State University found that from 1989 to 2001, the percentage of students treated for depression doubled, as did the percentage of suicidal students.

Experts suspect that the college years are an especially vulnerable time for students prone to depression because of a potent mix of the hormonal and neurological changes of late adolescence, and the stresses of college life. These stressors include independent living, new social situations, increased academic demands, financial responsibilities, and increased awareness of sexual identity and orientation.

students with depression, and a performer by Mentality, a U-M student advocacy group that explores mental health issues.

Three noted authors whose books address their own experiences with depression will give keynote addresses open to the public: National Book Award winner Andrew Solomon, author of *The Noonday Dream*; Meri Nana-Ama Danquah, who wrote *Willow Weep for Me: A Black Woman's Journey Through Depression*; and Kathy Cronkite, author of *On the Edge of Darkness: Conversations About Conquering Depression*, which features interviews with celebrities who have depression.

## AWARENESS GROWING

"Awareness of depression is growing in America, but we have not yet paid enough attention to the college population, who have both an adolescent's vulnerability to the onset of depression and nearly adult levels of independence and stress," explains Dr. John Greden, executive director of the U-M Depression Center. "Recent research confirms that

depression among college students is a neglected problem, and we must work together to address it."

Adds Earl Lewis, dean of the Rackham school: "We hope this conference will call attention to and work to ease the stigma of depression on the college campus. We need to learn from one another, and adapt the best practices from each campus to achieve earlier detection and effective intervention, including suicide prevention."

Greden and Lewis also hope the event will help identify barriers that stand in the way of implementation of effective strategies; formulate public policy interventions to overcome these barriers; and catalyze a coordinated, comprehensive approach to improve student mental health.

Among the topics to be addressed in the two full days of the event are: recognition of depression; issues facing student mental health services; innovative strategies now being tried at the U-M and other campuses; public policy approaches that may address

current needs; and special issues for students of different ethnicities, nationalities and genders.

A book-signing associated with the conference will be held 6:15 p.m. March 6 at the Michigan League. Solomon and Cronkite will be joined by Patrick Corrigan, the executive director of the University of Chicago Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, whose book on the stigma of mental illnesses is called *Don't Call Me Nuts*.

The conference is being planned by a committee co-chaired by Greden and Lewis, with faculty, staff and student participants from the U-M Depression Center and policy interventions to overcome these barriers; and catalyze a coordinated, comprehensive approach to improve student mental health. Among the topics to be addressed in the two full days of the event are: recognition of depression; issues facing student mental health services; innovative strategies now being tried at the U-M and other campuses; public policy approaches that may address

# Study finds mental gains after damage in premature babies

BY LINDSEY TANNER  
OF MEDICAL WRITER

CHICAGO (AP) - Neurological damage in very small premature babies may decrease over time, according to research that tracked children through age 8 and found substantial mental gains.

Many youngsters once considered retarded ended up scoring in the nearly normal range on tests of verbal function and IQ, the study found.

Children who received early intervention such as speech therapy, those from two-parent families, and those whose mothers had high levels of education were found to experience the greatest improvement in

mental function.

The findings are surprising because previous research has found negative long-term results for very small preemies, and conventional thinking says that IQ doesn't change - at least in people born at a normal weight.

"We were thrilled by the findings and surprised because previous reports suggested that there's an adverse outcome for very low birth-weight babies," said lead researcher Dr. Laura Ment, a Yale University pediatric neurologist.

"We found children progressively getting better between 3 and 8 years of age," Ment said.

The study involved 296 children born at 28 weeks and

weighing just over 2 pounds (one kilogram) or less. Results appear in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association.

Children born extremely prematurely are at risk for a variety of neurological problems, ranging from cerebral palsy, mental retardation and vision trouble to more subtle learning and behavior difficulties.

## BRAIN CAN REPAIR

Ment said the study results echo recent research in animals showing that the developing brain can repair itself.

A JAMA editorial suggests that broader tests of mental function would have had poorer

results and notes that IQ improvements were still in the average to low-average range.

"Despite improvements in scores, such low average functioning can place a child at significant academic disadvantage," said editorial author Glen Aylward, a developmental specialist at Southern Illinois University's medical school.

The youngsters were given a test of verbal abilities and three different IQ tests starting at age 3.

The average IQ scores increased from 90 to 95.

The average score on the verbal test increased from 88 points at age 3 to 99 points at age 8. Data from normal birth-weight children suggest average

verbal scores improve by about 4.5 points over time, the authors said.

Nearly half of the children with verbal scores in the mental retardation range - below 70 - at 3 years of age scored at least in the borderline range - 70 to 80 - at age 8. And about two-thirds of the children with borderline scores on both tests at age 3 had scores in the normal range at age 8.

A score of 100 would be average on both the IQ and verbal tests for a normal birth-weight 8-year-old.

Less significant improvements were found in children born with bleeding in the brain - a common complication in very low birth-weight babies.

Prominent preemie researcher Dr. Maureen Hack was skeptical of the results and said the children studied were not given tests designed to measure problems usually linked with prematurity, such as attention deficits and visual-motor impairments.

Hack also faulted the researchers for not comparing the prematurely born children with youngsters born at normal weight and said the preemies likely would have fared worse if such a comparison had been made.

"I personally feel that basically, the functional problems persist," said Hack, of Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital in Cleveland.

## YOGA

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niques to control breathing and mental function.

This is not meant to be an anatomical representation of the layers of the human body, but rather a metaphorical chart of the self.

"If physical body, energy body and mental body begin to function consciously, then you will see that health and well-being is very naturally taken care of," said Sadhguru.

The practices are said to stimulate the release of physical, mental and emotional blocks, which can lead to illness.

"Yoga is not oriented toward disease," said Sadhguru. "Yoga is oriented toward activating your energy body to its full

flow. When it is in full flow and in proper balance, the physical body and mental body can have no disease in them."

Karen Martin of Clinton Township heard about the program and came to see what Isha yoga is all about.

"My cousin took the program and has been enthralled with it," she said.

"I've been doing yoga without any thought of going past the physical aspect. Now, I want to go deeper and get more out of it."

Others came just to hear Sadhguru speak.

"We're all out there searching for the meaning of life, trying to reach inside ourselves and make sense of it all," said Sharon Merrill of Livonia.

"I enjoyed listening to

(Sadhguru's) talk. He says profound things in everyday language."

Susanah Holstein of Northville was in agreement.

"He's a sacred person," she said, "but he doesn't claim to be any different than the rest of us. I enjoy his presence."

Isha yoga is not associated with any religious tradition.

The Isha Foundation administers 50 centers, a medical facility and a children's home in Sadhguru's native India.

In addition to his talk at St. Mary Mercy Hospital, Sadhguru also spoke in Ann Arbor, Detroit, Warren and Pontiac. He will return to Michigan for a seven-day intensive program April 30 to May 6.

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