

# News

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\*\*\*\*Obsessive-compulsive disorder

Obsessive-compulsive disorder--a disabling mental condition that often strikes bright young professionals--has finally "come out of the closet," says a psychiatrist at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. And as more and more victims seek help, researchers such as John Cain, M.D., are stepping up the search for new and better treatments.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder--often called OCD--interferes with people's ability to function normally from day to day. In some cases sufferers feel compelled to perform a certain task--such as washing their hands--over and over in a ritualistic way. Others may be plagued by persistent thoughts--often of a morbid nature--rolling over and over in their minds and shutting out other mental processes.

As recently as the late '70s and early '80s, when Dr. Cain was in medical school and psychiatric residency training, "we were told that we might never see a patient with this problem because less than one-half of 1 percent of the population suffers from it," he said.

Revised estimates now indicate that more than 3 percent of the population--close to six million people--may suffer from obsessive-compulsive disorder, said Dr. Cain, an assistant professor in UT Southwestern's Department of Psychiatry.

The incidence of OCD is not actually increasing. More cases are being reported because recent media attention has generated widespread

(More)

public discussion and awareness of the disorder. As a result, more victims of OCD are seeking help.

"People experiencing symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder now realize that their symptoms are the same as those brought out in the recent flood of television talk shows and newspaper and magazine articles about the disorder," explained Cain.

"It tends to be an 'all or nothing' disease," he continued. "When persons with OCD first hear about it, they usually know they have it. They may have realized something was wrong but didn't know what it was. It can be very comforting to know that they're not the only ones in the world with this problem."

Dr. Cain said that people with OCD often have been plagued by this disability most of their lives because it usually has a fairly early onset. In fact, he said, it is not a rare disorder in children.

Fortunately, OCD is treatable. Dr. Cain, assistant director of outpatient services for psychiatry at Parkland Memorial Hospital and a consultant at UT Southwestern's new teaching hospital, Zale Lipshy University Hospital, is currently conducting a study of fluoxetine as a new drug for treating obsessive-compulsive disorder. An FDA-approved antidepressant that has few side effects, fluoxetine is used extensively with patients suffering from depression, but it has not yet been approved as a treatment for OCD.

Dr. Cain is looking for obsessive-compulsive disorder patients who are between 14 and 70 years old. Persons wishing to volunteer for this OCD drug study should contact his office at 214/688-3888.

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Note: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School.