

Health Awareness

A Serious Disorder Is More Common Than Many Think

(NAPSA)—A next door neighbor...a coworker...a friend...a relative...these are some of the people you know who may have bipolar disorder but may not know it.

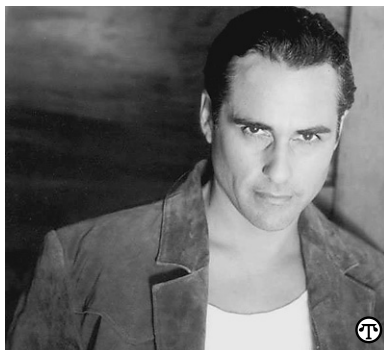
Bipolar disorder (also known as manic depression) is a chronic, sometimes progressive illness characterized by distressing and disruptive mood swings ranging from high (manic) to low (depressive) states. If ignored, bipolar disorder can have serious, harmful consequences such as damage to personal relationships, alcohol and/or drug abuse, job loss and suicide.

According to a recently published study in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, three times as many Americans than previously thought—or 1 in 30—may have bipolar disorder, which translates into nearly 8 million people.

“This study reveals that bipolar disorder occurs frequently and that we are missing most cases of it,” said Robert M.A. Hirschfeld, M.D., Titus Harris Chair, Professor and University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. “Bipolar disorder can be well managed when appropriately diagnosed; the problem is that most often it is completely unrecognized. The good news is that a simple screening tool is available for people who think they—or a loved one—may be experiencing the symptoms of bipolar disorder.”

Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder:

- Increased physical and mental activity and energy
- Significant changes in appetite and sleep patterns
- Decreased need for sleep without experiencing fatigue



TV star Maurice Benard says he's able to lead a positive, productive life now that his condition has been properly diagnosed.

- Feeling easily irritated
- Rapid speech, racing thoughts, flight of ideas
- Uncharacteristically poor judgement
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions
- Prolonged sadness or unexplained crying spells
- Inability to take pleasure in former interests, social withdrawal
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide
- In the most severe cases, delusions and hallucinations

A simple screening tool called Mood Disorder Questionnaire (or MDQ) is available at www.dbsalliance.org for those who believe they may be experiencing symptoms of bipolar disorder. The MDQ does not take the place of a physician's advice; therefore, anyone who completes the MDQ should discuss the results with their healthcare provider.

It is believed that typically what prevents people who may

have the illness from receiving an accurate diagnosis and treatment is the stigma and stereotype associated with bipolar disorder. On average, people with bipolar disorder will consult four doctors and receive up to four misdiagnoses over a nearly 10-year period before receiving an accurate diagnosis.

In an effort to help unmask the problem of under- and misdiagnosed cases of bipolar disorder, the National Mental Health Association (NMHA) has launched “Bipolar Disorder: Do You Know It?,” a nationwide public awareness campaign. Maurice Benard, who plays the mobster Sonny Corinthos on the ABC daytime drama “General Hospital,” has joined with the NMHA to increase awareness of the signs and symptoms of bipolar disorder and to encourage people to seek help.

“Even though I was first diagnosed with bipolar disorder at the age of 22, the diagnosis came only after a series of personal events ranging from being diagnosed with a brain virus to being told I was having a nervous breakdown,” said Benard. “Only after I was diagnosed was I finally able to manage my illness and work to lead a more positive, productive life. By partnering with NMHA, I hope to encourage those who may be affected by bipolar disorder, as well as their friends and families, to learn more about the illness and take the steps needed to win their struggle with the illness.”

For more information about bipolar disorder, please call the National Mental Health Association at 1-800-969-NMHA, or go to nmha.org or ibipolar.com.