

EDITORIAL ADVISOR



Valerie A. Hart, EdD, APRN, CS
Associate Professor of Nursing,
University of Southern Maine;
Private Psychotherapy Practice,
Portland, Me
Disclosure: No financial
relationships to disclose

CONTRIBUTING FACULTY



**Nancy Balkon, PhD, ANP-C,
APRN**
Clinical Associate Professor,
Stony Brook University School
of Nursing, Stony Brook, NY;
Nurse Practitioner, Zucker
Hillside Hospital Evaluation
Center, North Shore—Long Island Jewish
Health System, Glen Oaks, NY
Disclosure: No financial relationships to
disclose



Kimberly Littrell, MS, ARNP, BC
President and Chief Executive
Officer, Promedica, Inc.;
Adjunct Professor, College of
Health Sciences, Georgia State
University, Atlanta, Ga
Disclosure: Speaker's Bureau:
AstraZeneca, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Janssen;
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Janssen, Solvay

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Improving the Quality of Care: Depression Treatment in Primary Care

A guest editorial by Valerie A. Hart, EdD, APRN, CS

Recent data indicates that as many as 9% of patients seen in the primary care setting are afflicted with a depressive illness. Depression is a serious illness that can destroy daily life. Negatively affecting all aspects of personal functioning, depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide. In fact, depressive disorders account for more than 20,000 suicides each year. Fortunately, in the face of these sobering statistics, the spectrum of depressive disorders remains highly treatable. However, it is imperative to be aware of the signs and symptoms of depression, as the vast majority of individuals with depression do not seek help for it.



Primary care providers are often the first healthcare professionals to learn about a patient's physical and emotional complaints. Nurse practitioners play a critical role in recognizing and treating depression. Successful interventions start with appropriate screening. A variety of applicable diagnostic tools are available for the primary care setting, as basic as a symptom checklist or the more complete and accurate focused interview. Most importantly, by *truly listening* and understanding your patients' experiences, you can effectively establish a therapeutic relationship and create the environment that allows you to assess when patients may need a referral to a mental health specialist for more extensive psychiatric treatment. It is important to remember that often it is a combination of psychotherapy and medications that provide the best outcomes for patients and so having a solid referral network will be an important resource.

To assist you in the contemporary management of your patients with depression, I am pleased to bring to you this timely issue of *CE-TODAY for Nurse Practitioners* and the companion multimedia CD. This program will focus on the pathophysiology of depressive illness, the need for a comprehensive, patient-centered management plan, as well an overview of current research on treatment and therapeutic approaches.

As Editorial Advisor of this comprehensive CE offering, it is my hope that this issue will become a valuable reference tool as it empowers you to explore current strategies in the assessment and treatment of depression in the primary care setting. I look forward to future dialogue about your experience with this program and the ways in which it assists you in your clinical practice.

Sincerely,

Valerie A. Hart, EdD, APRN, CS
Editorial Advisor, *CE-TODAY*