

Carnegie Mellon

Equal Opportunity Services • Whitfield Hall, 143 N Craig Street, Pittsburgh PA 15213

Everett Tademy, Director (412) 268-2012 et19@andrew.cmu.edu Larry Powell, EOS Manager (412) 268-2013–
lpowell@andrew.cmu.edu Courtney Bryant, EOS Administrative Coordinator (412) 268-2012 – cbryant@andrew.cmu.edu
<http://hr.web.cmu.edu/dsrg/index.htm>

BIPOLAR FACT SHEET

This sheet is intended to assist faculty/advisors in helping students. The information is generic in nature and is not specific to a certain student. If information on an individual student is needed, the instructor should request that the student share their individualized letter and accommodation plan. For more information on a student's disability or any other disability, contact Larry Powell in the Equal Opportunity Services office.

Definition: Bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression, is an illness involving one or more episodes of serious mania and depression. The illness causes a person's mood to swing from excessively "high" and/or irritable to sad and hopeless, with periods of a normal mood in between. Bipolar disorder can be extremely distressing and disruptive for those who have this disease. Although there is no known cure, bipolar disorder is treatable, and recovery is possible. A combination of medications and psychotherapy helps the vast majority of people return to productive, fulfilling lives.

Causes: Although a genetic link to bipolar disorder has not been found, a high percentage of those who suffer from bipolar disorder have relatives with some form of depression. Also here is an inherit tendency to develop the illness, which can be triggered by environmental factors such as distressing life events. The presence of bipolar disorder indicates a biochemical imbalance which alters a person's moods. This imbalance is thought to be caused by irregular hormone production or to a problem with certain chemicals in the brain, called neurotransmitters which act as messengers to our nerve cells.

Symptoms: Bipolar disorder is often difficult to recognize and diagnose. It causes a person to have a high level of energy, unrealistically expansive thoughts or ideas, and impulsive or reckless behavior. These symptoms may feel good to a person, which may lead to denial that there is a problem.

Symptoms of depression include:

- ✓ Persistent sad, anxious, or empty mood
- ✓ Sleeping too much or too little, middle-of-the-night or early morning waking
- ✓ Reduced appetite and weight loss or increased appetite and weight gain
- ✓ Loss of interest or pleasure in activities, including sex
- ✓ Irritability or restlessness
- ✓ Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions.
- ✓ Fatigue or loss of energy
- ✓ Persistent physical symptoms that don't respond to treatment (such as chronic pain or digestive disorders)
- ✓ Thoughts of death or suicide, including suicide attempts
- ✓ Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless

Symptoms of mania include:

- Excessive energy, activity, restlessness, racing thoughts and rapid talking
- Denial that anything is wrong
- Extreme "high" or euphoric feelings
- Easily irritated or distracted.
- Decreased need for sleep
- Unrealistic beliefs in one's ability and powers
- Uncharacteristically poor judgment
- Sustained period of behavior that is different from usual
- Unusual sexual drive
- Abuse of drugs, alcohol or sleeping medications
- Provocative, intrusive, or aggressive behavior

Larry Powell, Carnegie Mellon University 143 North Craig Street Room 102, Pittsburgh, PA 15213
lpowell@andrew.cmu.edu <http://hr.web.cmu.edu/eos.html> Phone/TTY (412)268-2013 Fax(412)268-7472

This document can be produced in an alternative format. Call 412/268-2012