

# How to 'immunize' against depression

Martin Davies has published an accessible guide to coping with depression. His editor, Wendy Bennett, explains

Is depression like a 'virus'? Can you 'catch' it? Will it attack and destroy someone's emotional immunity? Can you stop it multiplying and causing further 'infection'? Martin Davies, a former community psychiatric nurse, who now specializes in depression and stress training, thinks so and he has written and illustrated a self-help cartoon book on the subject, *Sod It! The Depression 'Virus' and How to Deal with It*, which can be used by both patients and practice nurses.

According to Meltzer et al (1995), up to a quarter of patients attending a GP surgery suffer from depression. The PREDICT study of Depression in European general practice estimates that depression will rank second to cardiovascular disease as a global cause of disability by 2020 (King et al, 2006).

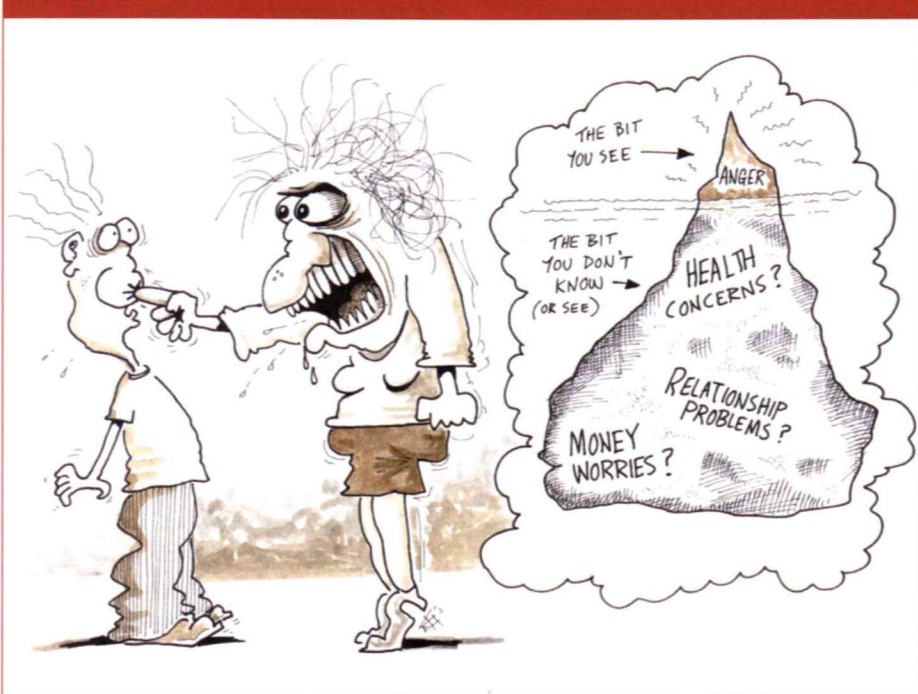
As a mental health nurse for 25 years, Martin Davies has long recognized the consequences of depression in the community, namely:

- ▶ As many people die of depression as they do of asthma, diabetes and heart disease, yet resources, training and manpower are targeted at everything but depression
- ▶ The number of people who take their own lives through depression every year is the equivalent of three jumbo jets crashing with a full payload
- ▶ Depression is no respecter of age, culture, gender, background or lifestyle; it can 'infect' the young, the old, the rich and the poor.
- ▶ With a slow rate of onset, the symptoms may not become apparent

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until the 'virus' is well-established—and it is 'highly contagious'.

While agreeing that the cost of depression in terms of human misery is incalculable, Martin believes that, in most cases, depression need not be a long-term illness, because it can be prevented and treated if caught early. Yet the right resources are not always readily available.

## Avoiding 'psycho-babble'

Troubled by the number of books on the subject which are full of jargon, charts, and what he calls 'psycho-babble', Martin set out to produce an easily readable, low-cost, book which could be used by patients, families and professionals alike. The result is a 96-page cartoon book which explains how to recognize and understand depression, as well as how to deal with it,

popular topic,' he says. 'Most books are either "heavy", biased, or simply not understandable. I've realized that my cartoons make more sense of the literature—they are accessible, as well as humorous. This book is about making sense of a difficult topic. It also creates an immediate empathetic response from the reader, allowing him or her to make quick connections with the main message.'

## Personal experience

By his own admission, for personal and professional reasons, Martin himself suffered several bouts of depression after 'burning out' towards the end of his time in primary care. He managed to keep working, but became aware that he was making avoidable mistakes and errors. A change of career led to him running an educational project on depression.

Through working with supportive colleagues and seeking good help he was able to work through his depression. He now delivers courses and presentations throughout the UK on depression as well as on stress, which is strongly linked with depression.

## Resource

*Sod It! The Depression 'Virus' and How to Deal with It* is a comprehensive resource for any health professional working with people who are affected by depression. It is a resource that can be easily shared with patients and with patients' families. It also contains a positive message for everyone: that depression is not all bad—sufferers can come out of the experience wiser and more knowledgeable and with an increased ability to cope with daily life.

## References

King M, Weich S, Torres-González F, Švab I, Maaroos H-I, Neeleman J, Xavier M (2006) Prediction of depression in European general practice attendees: The PREDICT study. *BMC Public Health* 6: 6. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-6-6

Meltzer H, Gill B, Petticrew M et al (1995) *OPCS Surveys of Psychiatric Morbidity in Great Britain*. Report 1: The prevalence of psychiatric morbidity among adults living in private households. Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. HMSO, London

## Sod It! The Depression 'Virus' and How to Deal with It by Martin Davies

Sod It! Books, 2006 RP £5.99  
96 pages ISBN: 1-901910-23-7  
Visit [www.sod-itbooks.co.uk](http://www.sod-itbooks.co.uk) or  
telephone 0151 632 0662

*This feature article about 'Sod it! The Depression 'Virus' & How to Deal with it appeared in the October 2006 issue of the prestigious 'Practice Nursing' magazine*

keep it at bay and prevent it returning (which it often does). The book makes use of cognitive therapy techniques and includes ten 'diary' templates, an activity diary, sections on problem-solving, how to approach a GP and how to get and use support.

Martin makes the point in the book that people *want* to help, but often need to be asked. Support can come from friends, family, acquaintances, the GP, the practice nurse, local or national support groups, and helplines and agencies, a contact list for which appears in the book.

By illustrating the book with cartoons, and presenting depression as a 'virus' that can be 'caught', can 'multiply' and cause further 'infection', Martin believes he has found a way of communicating a serious subject in an understandable way.

'Depression has never been a "sexy" or