

The Dangers of Misdiagnosed Depression

- As the total number of depressed patients climbs, many of us are given the wrong diagnosis

By: Monica Gaza, Life & Style Editor



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Depression has slowly turned into one of the staple conditions of our times: it affects people of all ages, backgrounds, lifestyles and nationalities, with about 121 million people worldwide currently suffering from depression and fewer than 25% of them having access to effective treatment. Not only is depression among the leading causes of disability worldwide, but about 80% of suicide deaths occur in sufferers of major depression.

Despite these alarming statistics, we're constantly being told that depression can be reliably diagnosed and effectively treated with targeted medication and structured psychotherapy. However, there are those who claim that because of the increasingly large number of people diagnosed with this condition, doctors are more and more likely to misdiagnose patients who complain of feeling worn out, having trouble making decisions or getting out of bed in the morning. In fact a recent study shows that while depression is indeed among the modern "global killers", many doctors mistake symptoms of a physical condition for depression and thus thousands of patients get misdiagnosed.

"A study by an American psychiatrist found that more than 10 % of patients diagnosed with mental illness are actually suffering from an underlying physical condition, such as a heart murmur or a mineral deficiency such as calcium or magnesium that causes depression-like symptoms", claims Professor Jane Plant, a researcher from University College Hospital in London, who co-authored a book called "Beating Stress, Anxiety And Depression". She claims that in many patients, what passes for depression is in fact a side effect of medication taken for other conditions.

"There are seven different types of anxiety and depression [...] and each needs to be treated differently", says Professor Plant, adding that "the problem is that confronted with a mental health problem, doctors are often quick to prescribe a mind-altering pill rather than to think of some other form of treatment such as therapy. This is the way they have been trained, yet often that is not the solution". The bottom line is that we should all resist the "treatment first, test later" approach and ask to be given blood tests before being prescribed anti-depressants, to avoid being administered the wrong medication.