



# MISSISSIPPI STATE HOSPITAL

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## **For Immediate Release**

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## **MSH RECOGNIZES MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS WEEK**

WHITFIELD—Mississippi State Hospital is joining organizations across the state and the country in recognizing Mental Illness Awareness Week, Oct. 4 – 10, in an effort to promote public awareness and education about mental illnesses.

Designated by Congress, Mental Illness Awareness Week aims to educate on serious mental illnesses like depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, while also making the public aware of some little-realized facts: that about 60 million Americans experience mental health issues each year, and one out of every five people will experience mental illness at some point in their lives.

“Unfortunately, due to the negative stereotypes many people hold today, mental illness is a topic that is often avoided in conversation and hidden from friends and loved ones,” said MSH Director James Chastain. “The truth is that mental illness requires attention just like any kind of sickness does.

“Having good mental health is an essential factor in maintaining good physical health. Understanding that is the starting point in treatment and recovery,” Chastain said.

The U.S. Surgeon General has acknowledged that stigma is a major barrier in people seeking treatment for mental illness, making the need for public education even more important than ever.

In conjunction with Mental Illness Awareness Week, the Mississippi Department of Mental Health is launching its “Think Again” campaign, a state-wide effort to educate about Mental Illness and dispel the stigma so often attached with seeking treatment.

As part of the campaign, representatives from DMH and Mississippi State Hospital will be scheduling presentations to school groups, civic clubs and other organizations. These presentations will include a comprehensive look at mental illness and include some startling statistics that should bring home the importance of the campaign.

For instance, among young adults, the number of serious mental health conditions is high, but this age group is the one least likely to seek help. And here’s another shocking statistic: suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15-24 year olds in Mississippi.

The Think Again campaign will also present some disquieting information about alcohol use, such as the fact that 37 percent of people who die by suicide have measurable blood alcohol content at the

time of death, and that young people who begin drinking before the age of 15 are five times more likely to develop alcohol-related problems.

“It is important to provide education and prevention efforts at an early age to truly make a difference,” DMH Public Information Director Wendy Bailey said. “With this campaign we are empowering youth by teaching them how to support their friends, how to recognize warning signs of suicide and how to seek help for themselves or a friend.”

Anyone wishing to schedule a presentation or to receive more information on the campaign can contact Kris Jones or Wendy Bailey at 601-359-1288 or visit [www.dmh.ms.gov](http://www.dmh.ms.gov).

Another resource for those wishing to learn more about mental illness is the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Since its inception in 1979, NAMI has been dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families affected by mental illness.

NAMI's education efforts are focused on educating the public about mental health and offering resources to those in need, as well as insisting that mental illness become a priority for the nation. Its web site can be reached at [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org).

An upcoming television program can also be another resource for those looking to learn about mental health. In October, PBS stations across the country will begin to air *Minds on the Edge: Facing Mental Illness*, an exceptional program that challenges the mental health care system. For more information, including local broadcast dates, please visit [www.mindsontheedge.org](http://www.mindsontheedge.org).

“Treatment works, but people have to know it is ok to seek treatment first,” Chastain said. “In order for everyone to realize that, we need to do our part to educate the community. That will be the first step in meeting the needs of our community and overcoming the challenges in front of us.”

*MSH, a facility of the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, was founded in 1855 and facilitates improvement in the quality of life for Mississippians who are in need of mental health, chemical dependency or nursing home services, by rehabilitating to the least restrictive environment, utilizing a range of psychiatric and medical services, which reflect the accepted standard of care and are in compliance with statutory and regulatory guidelines. Accredited by the Joint Commission, MSH is the largest hospital in Mississippi and the largest public psychiatric facility in the United States.*