

New generation of drugs helps reduce depression

The drugs help hold serotonin in neural synapses, increasing the force of emotions

By Ben Romano
Higher Education Reporter

One in four women and one in eight men experience depression, according to the National Institute for Mental Illness. Symptoms of depression range from fluctuations in weight to feelings of hopelessness and sadness.

There are effective treatments for depression available in the form of Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs). Prozac, Zoloft, Paxil and Luvox are four SSRIs commonly used to treat depression, said Dr. William Disher, a practitioner at the Student Health Center. These four are part of a new generation of SSRIs that are tolerated better by many patients. They

can be used more effectively without many side effects, he added.

Serotonin is a chemical that passes information about emotion across neural synapses, which are the gaps between nerve cells in the brain. SSRIs treat depression by keeping serotonin in the synapses for a longer time and thus enhancing the strength of the emotion.

"SSRIs are the first line of treatment for physicians prescribing antidepressants," said Judy Sonnenberg, a psychologist at the University Counseling Center. They are as effective as other antidepressants and are relatively safe in overdose situations, she added.

"Most practitioners are comfortable starting a patient on SSRIs if they are clinically depressed," said Dr. Regina McGlothlin, a staff psychiatrist at the Student Health Center.

SSRIs can also be used to treat some forms of eating disorders, mi-

graine headaches, anxiety disorders and other mental disorders caused by biochemical imbalances, McGlothlin said.

Some common side effects associated with SSRIs are nausea and other gastrointestinal symptoms, a "revved" or "wired" sensation and insomnia. There are also some sexual side effects such as a reduction in libido, Disher said.

"All problems are 100 percent reversible by stopping taking the medications," he said.

Patients who take SSRIs can be on them for as long as six months to a year for major depression. For more severe cases, patients may take SSRIs indefinitely.

Not all depression is treated with SSRIs, but the drugs are prescribed quite frequently.

"Of those patients who come to the health center for depression, I would guess 50 to 75 percent end up on antidepressants," Disher

said. "Many people who suffer from mental illness lead normal lives because of medications," Sonnen-

berg said. "Typically the combination of medication and psychotherapy is the best treatment available for mental illness."



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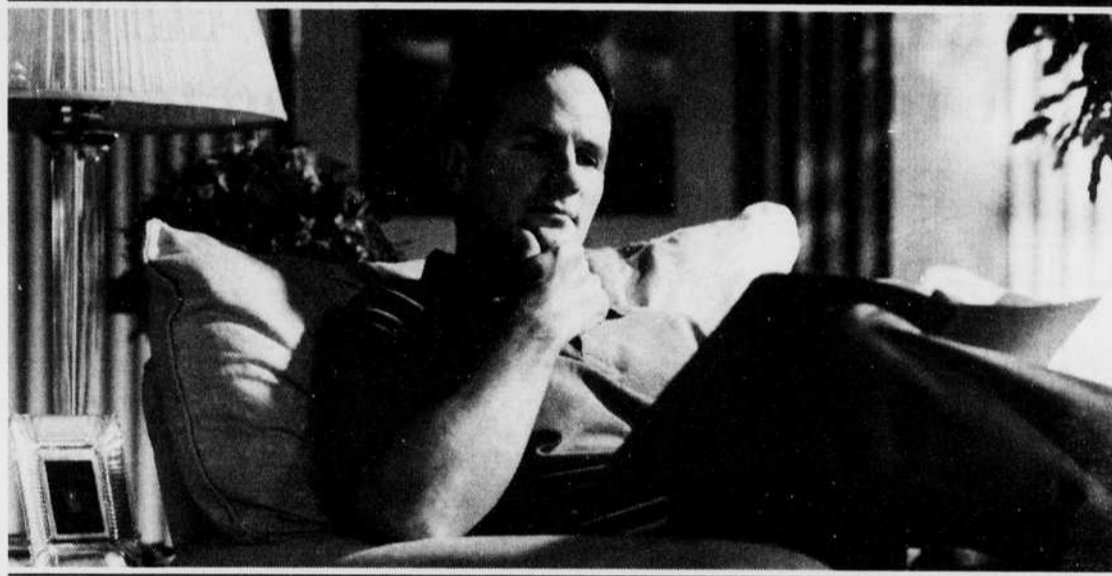
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