

Healthy Minds – Depression Featuring a Conversation With Mike Wallace

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Announcer: This week on Healthy Minds, prominent psychiatrist, Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein sits down with news veteran, Mike Wallace, and his wife Mary as they share their 20 year battle with his depression.

Mike Wallace: I haven't told about this in quite this graphic a fashion. I figured, hey, I have to get out of here. So I took a bunch of sleeping pills.

Mary Wallace: I couldn't wake him up and that was really, really scary.

Announcer: Experts on the forefront of research talk about hope and treatment for those suffering from depression.

Dr. Eric Kandel: People who suffer from depression say it is the most awful feeling you can possibly have, worse than cancer.

Announcer: That's this week on Healthy Minds. Healthy Minds on WLIW-21 is made possible in part by NARSAD. NARSAD is dedicated to supporting innovative scientific research to find the causes, better treatments and cures for severe mental illness. And by ValueOptions®, working with health plans, employers and government programs, ValueOptions® manages behavioral health care and substance abuse services for people throughout New York, New Jersey and Connecticut; by the New York Academy of Medicine, working to enhance the health of people living in cities worldwide through research, education, efficacy and prevention; by the van Ameringen Foundation. Since 1950 the Foundation has supported prevention, education and direct care programs that seek to promote positive change in the mental health field. And by the New York State Office of Mental Health, promoting the mental health of all New Yorkers.

Female Speaker: Depression is one of those characteristics where people need to intervene when they see behavioral changes. I feel that families that struggle with depression need to be vocal about it. It needs to be an open conversation.

Female Speaker: I personally have not experienced depression but I know people who have and I think it's a very, very serious problem. I think it's a very important subject.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: Hi, I'm Dr. Jeff Borenstein. Did you know that over 17 million Americans experience depression each year? Like any other illness, depression is treatable and that's really good news. But how do you know if you need to seek help? Let's hear from Nobel Prize winner, Dr. Eric Kandel (ph.) from Columbia University. He describes what it's like for a person with depression.

Dr. Eric Kandel: Five percent of the population suffers a major depression. Depression manifests itself by feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, despondency, Anhedonia, an inability to enjoy a good glass of wine, a nice meal, a partner. People who suffer from depression say it is the most awful feeling you can possibly have, worse than cancer. And one of the reasons it's so frightening is when people feel that badly, they want to end their life. And of course suicide is the most frightening aspect of any mental illness and the incidents of suicide is a serious problem. It's a significant issue of depression. So if a relative becomes depressed, one of the first things one wants to think about is to make sure that there is no additional (unint.) thoughts of doing away with oneself and making sure that the person is accompanied by somebody under all circumstances if there's any concern at all about this. And of course over and beyond this, to get that person to treatment. Now unlike the situation of schizophrenia

where even successful treatment reaches only a component, a significant component but only a component of illness, the positive symptoms, with depression, the treatment is really quite effective and many people, most people will respond to anti-depression medication.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: With more people coming forward and talking about depression, we realize there's no need to be ashamed. One person who's come forward to speak about his experiences is Mike Wallace, who we all know is one of America's leading journalists. Recently I met with him and his wife Mary in their home where they shared intimate details of his struggle with depression, including a suicide attempt and his ultimate recovery. What was it like the first time you had a clinical depression?

Mike Wallace: Well, never having had it before, at least I don't remember having had it before, I was convinced. Mary was different. She knew that I was in a depression. I just thought I was having a bad time. And my family doctor at the time said, "Oh, Mike, you're a tough guy. You're feeling down and stay away from the word depression." Now mind you, this was, I guess...

Mary Wallace: Twenty-two, 1982, '82.

Mike Wallace: Yeah. This was 22 years ago and he said...and we were good friends, this doctor and I. And he had been very good. He said, "No, look. You're a tough guy, you'll get through it, you're going through a hard time." And when I, I guess Mary must have said something about a depression, he said, "forget the word depression because that'll be bad for your image."

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: The stigma?

Mike Wallace: Yeah. And in retrospect, I think what a damn fool he was. There's nothing to be ashamed of about depression. But in any case, I was beginning to feel really, couldn't eat, couldn't sleep; took sleeping pills, couldn't sleep. And at that time, I wasn't seeing a psychiatrist then.

Mary Wallace: No.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: How did you end up seeing a psychiatrist? What did you do to find one?

Mike Wallace: What happened was that I...anybody who's that depressed, anyone, male, female, whatever, contemplates suicide. I mean, the pain of it, the pain of depression, you're copeless, you're hopeless, you don't want to eat. You find it difficult to sleep. It's never out of your mind. As a result of which, well you tell what happened.

Mary Wallace: You tell what happened.

Mike Wallace: I was having difficulty sleeping and I finally, finally, I haven't told about this in quite this graphic a fashion, I figured, hey, I have to get out of here. So I took a bunch of sleeping pills, wrote a note and ate them. And as a result, I fell asleep. And my friend here...

Mary Wallace: Well, oh, I couldn't wake him up and that was really, really scary. And I'd do this and that and I finally called the doctor and said, "get over here," and he came and immediately called the ambulance and off we went. But it's very frightening when that happens because you forget what you're supposed to do.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: It must have been so scary for you and you fortunately were able to take the right action to get help right away.

Mary Wallace: Yes. I guess what the fastest thing, instead of calling the doctor is to call 911 and get

anybody there to take them to the hospital. I waited for the doctor to come, which I don't think is a good idea. It was three in the morning, I believe.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: And then after that, what happened?

Mary Wallace: Well then he was in the hospital for a while and...

Mike Wallace: They pumped my stomach, I guess.

Mary Wallace: Yeah. And then started in psychiatry.

Mike Wallace: Incidentally she tore up the suicide note and she got the rest of the sleeping pills that were...

Mary Wallace: Well I knew what had happened and in those days, that's 22 years ago or something, it was so horrible for somebody to commit suicide. You would be ashamed of that. And people used to lie about that if somebody committed suicide, which again is something that happens all the time. But I wanted to hide it even from the doctor that I was calling. Talk about stigma and how stupid that is, yes. I was hiding...I wish we had that note that you wrote.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: Do you remember what it said?

Mary Wallace: I don't remember. He was leaving money to people and I don't think you talked about yourself...I don't remember.

Mike Wallace: It took me a long time to acknowledge what we've just said. I mean, it took me until a couple or three months ago so it's a long time. In any case, for people who are contemplating suicide, contemplate, who are so damn scared and in pain and all of those things are true when you're in a bad clinical depression. Take a look at me, that what I've learned is that because I was saved I had 20 more years of very productive life. And this is the lesson that I take from it, I was out of my mind. I was a little crazy. And if you can somehow wait it out, if your companion is like this one, you're going to get better.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: You need to get the treatment. If you get the treatment...

Mike Wallace: If you get the treatment.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: You'll get better.

Mike Wallace: When I'm talking like this publicly, what I say to the people who are looking in, it can be treated, you can get better, you can, if you find a good shrink. And I believe, talk therapy because there was that and medications, and I know that for me anyway, the talking was important to talk to the shrink that way. And of course the drug that I was taking at the time was called Ludiamill (ph.).

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: Caused a number of side effects.

Mike Wallace: It sure did. First of all, your hands shake. Secondly, you're dry here, here, here, etc. And our intimate life disappeared.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: As a result of the side effect of the medicine?

Mike Wallace: As a result of the Ludiamill. The...in any case, enough. I decided okay, I was better. What happened was I was feeling pretty good, began to play tennis, etc., etc. and all of a sudden broke

this wrist. I could feel it go crack underneath me, fell on it and I was back in almost immediately, still on Ludiamill. So I knew, at least I was sensible enough to understand it can be handled. And as I say, I was...I finally got through that and then I turned 75 and I was in it again. For whatever reason, I don't know, I really don't know what triggered it.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: There was no external other than just...

Mike Wallace: No, no. I was being difficult. How difficult was I?

Mary Wallace: Well, you're always difficult and then he gets more difficult.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: What's it like for you, Mary, when he was going through these depressions? Mike said he was difficult. What is it like for the spouse to live with someone?

Mary Wallace: Well, what happens is you'll start blaming yourself and think you're not doing the right thing. This is even when you understand depression a little bit, you still kind of think, gosh, I could make it all right if I do the right thing. And that's not true. Well, while you're thinking that, you're very unhappy and confused and out of control. You don't know what to do to make it better. And that's, I think, the feeling that parents or husbands or wives have, children have about their parents, well one of their parents that may be going through it. You're out of control of a situation that's so personal. You have no control over it.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: And with the stigma, it's the kind of thing you may not feel comfortable talking about with a friend.

Mary Wallace: Yes. You become very alone because you don't want to go out with the girls at lunch and say my husband is just awful; he won't talk to me; he won't eat; he's mad; he loses his temper. So you become isolated too. And I think it's a very good idea somebody's whose living with a depressed person to go and get some help themselves, him or herself, to go and talk to a psychiatrist yourself and have 'em tell you it's not your fault, kid, and maybe make some suggestions that help. But the only suggestion that's any good is to make sure they get some help. And somebody else has to handle it; you can't do it yourself. A doctor has to...

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: Has to help.

Mary Wallace: Has to help handle it.

Mike Wallace: But she was the one who insisted, "you're depressed, so do something about it, damn it."

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: And you got him to get the treatment that he needed?

Mary Wallace: Yes, but not understanding what I was talking about myself. But something was wrong. And when it's wrong, we just go and try to find somebody that knows what's happening and what to do about it. It's not easy either to find someone. I mean, you have to start and just do research on it or have somebody that knows somebody, but that's hard.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: Since that three episode, you haven't had any other episodes of depression?

Mike Wallace: Third episode...by this time Zoloft® (ph.) had come along and so I was...I used to travel and liked to travel a lot, unlike now. And I went to Beirut. But shortly before I went to Beirut, I began to feel a little something was going on. And I was taking Zoloft® and it takes a little time for Zoloft® to take hold. I was told it was six to eight weeks. Well, five weeks, six weeks, seven weeks, eight weeks and I

still wasn't...it had not taken hold. And I figured what the dickens, the way I feel, because being Jewish and going to an Arab country...

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: And you were going to interview the leader of Hasbullah and the CIA, I think, warned you you might be in danger doing that?

Mike Wallace: That's exactly right. That's exactly right. And (unint.), I figured the way I feel, okay. That's a good place to go and if it happens, it happens. In any case, got there and we went up...I remember this so well...we went to a hotel to stay, which was up on a hill overlooking Beirut and looking down into the horror that was a beat up Beirut but the hotel itself was very comfortable and I remember so well. I was waiting for this damn thing to take hold, this Zolof® thing that I'd heard so much about and all of a sudden, I woke up one morning there...I'd been there for about a week, I guess, is it possible? And I woke up the next day and not only was it possible, it had taken hold, and suddenly, I mean it, it was astonishing, really. And that was how long ago?

Mary Wallace: Fifteen years, I don't know.

Mike Wallace: Yeah, yeah. And haven't had a whisper since, of depression. I have had some, you know, interesting times, tough times, etc. but depression as such, haven't, and I don't even bother knocking wood. What I do is I stay on that drug and will have to stay on that drug, medication for the rest of my life. But that's a small price to pay for that kind of...

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: For not having the depression?

Mike Wallace: Right.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: Other than the medicine and seeing the psychiatrist, are there other things, such as exercise, that you find helpful?

Mike Wallace: Exercise is wonderful. If you exercise, you sweat. For some reason, it diminishes the business of the tension, it really does. You begin to...look, the self absorption of depression, you know, you feel so sorry for yourself and even of those around you. And this one was really an angel. The exercise, what else?

Mary Wallace: I think making you make yourself go out, see friends and see that life can be fun again.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: Like going out and doing things that you enjoy?

Mary Wallace: Uh-huh. Go to a good movie.

Mike Wallace: But what happened was that I was able to go back to work.

Mary Wallace: Well you always worked even through everything.

Mike Wallace: Well, I know but I was not as effective a reporter with that hanging over you as I can be.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: What words of advice, and you've already given some advice, but what words of advice, somebody is out there now and they're in pain or their loved one is in pain, what should they do?

Mike Wallace: Well, first of all, find a good psychiatrist. And there are ways, I mean, the culture, if you want to call it that, there's nothing, you're not a nut case if you want to go see a psychiatrist. Mental

illness, I mean, for while when you'd talk about mental illness, you wouldn't want to acknowledge that. Hey, it's an illness, like any other, not like any other but it's an illness. And so if you can find yourself a psychiatrist or a psychologist, except that the psychiatrist has the ability to prescribe the medications and the psychiatrist, you are not to a psychiatrist the strange character. He or she has seen patients like you over and over and over again.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: And have helped them get back.

Mike Wallace: And have helped them and they learn the ins and outs so they know what questions to ask and what medications to prescribe and so forth. So that to me is the single most important thing you can do, is to go and talk to someone, for instance like you.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: As a psychiatrist, I very much appreciate Mike and Mary Wallace speaking out about his personal experience. What's most striking to me is how he describes it, with treatment, he's had 20 wonder years after a suicide attempt that could have ended his life. We all experience emotional ups and downs. But if you have a depression that persists and includes symptoms such as sleeping appetite disturbance, inability to enjoy yourself and/or thoughts of hurting yourself, that's the time to seek treatment. And remember, with help, there's hope. Until next time, I'm Dr. Jeff Borenstein.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: For more information, please visit our website at WLIW.org/HealthyMinds.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: Hi, I'm Dr. Jeff Borenstein, join me next week when we go into greater detail about depression including treatment.

Dr. Lloyd I. Sederer: Only four in 10 people who have depression get diagnosed for their condition.

Female Speaker: I had a pain, constant that my heart was breaking. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't move. I would...there were times when I would just fall on the floor and cry. I cried the way I've never heard anybody cry in my life.

Dr. Lloyd I. Sederer: Now those people who are diagnosed, a very small proportion of them actually get what we call minimally adequate care.

Male Speaker: I was in fact, classically depressed and in treatment so I began looking for something and in that search, I encountered Lincoln story. The beginning of a story is dominated by these breakdowns. He had two terrible breakdowns. He was suicidal, in one of which he wrote this letter, "I am now the most miserable man living."

Joshua Wolf Shenk (quoting Abraham Lincoln): I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on the earth. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell. I awfully forebode, I shall not.

Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein: If you or someone you know are concerned about depression, I hope you'll watch.

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