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## Press Information

### **Depression, a treatable disease! Causes and multi-modal treatment options**

8<sup>th</sup> European Depression Day on October the 1<sup>st</sup> 2011

Berlin (Germany), 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2011 – Depressions are common psychiatric diseases. In Germany, about 4 million people are suffering from a depression. In 2008, the Federal Statistical Office specified the indirect costs of depression to be 5.2 billion Euros. The likelihood to develop a depression in the course of life is between 16 and 20 per cent. The World Health Organization (WHO) predicts an increasing relevance of depressive disorders in the future. "This will have considerable socio-economic consequences. The large number of diseases causes direct costs (treatment from the health care system) and indirect costs (loss of earnings, less contribution to social insurance). However, even more important, depression causes a tremendous amount of suffering of those affected and of their personal environment", says Prof. Dr. Dr. Frank Schneider, Director of the Clinic for Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics at the University Clinic of Aachen and Director of JARA-BRAIN, on the occasion of the 8<sup>th</sup> European Depression Day on October the 1<sup>st</sup> 2011.

### **Genetics and biological, psychosocial factors**

Depressions affect both men and women and are most likely caused by a combination of biological and psychosocial factors. A popular hypothesis is the so-called vulnerability-stress model, which assumes that the process of psychiatric diseases is a combination of biological vulnerability, for example genetics, and the occurrence of psycho-social stress. Thereby, genetic influences on different probabilities of occurrence depending on the relationship to a depressive patient can be explained (nearly 40 per cent risk of disease for a monozygotic twin compared to 5-8 per cent for the general population) can be demonstrated.

Not only because of this fact, but also based on results from functional imaging studies, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging, there are clear hints for neurobiological correlates of depressive disorders. Furthermore, it is an established fact that there can be other biological causes of depressions. Thus, different somatic diseases can increase the likelihood of a depression considerably. For example, this is true for infectious and thyroid diseases as well as other brain diseases such as Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease. However, these findings do not challenge the relevance of social causes, such as job-related stress or private stress. Rather, they emphasize the multi-factorial model of causes.

## **New approaches in neuropsychiatric research**

Current neuropsychiatric research promises a significant progress in the diagnostics and therapy of depressive disorders. Aside from some basic examinations, for example the difference between the volume of different brain structures in healthy persons and patients or examinations of neurobiological changes in the animal model, functional magnetic resonance imaging seems to be particularly suitable to gain new insights. This methodology allows for examining brain functions, which are - for example - related to the processing of emotions or the influence of emotions on attention and memory. Amazingly, only in the last few years has there been a new emphasis on gender differences, which had been disregarded for some time, probably due to reasons of political correctness.

Today, treatment of depression is based upon two pillars. There are well established and effective psychotherapeutic methods, which are very helpful to many patients. However, most of the patients need medicamentous treatment – in addition to the psychotherapeutic methods. Here, good and effective drugs are available. Generally, they are indicated for moderate depression and particularly for acute and severe depressions. In addition to acute therapy and maintenance treatment over the first couple of months, medicamentous therapy includes relapse prevention which can last for many years. New therapeutic methods might evolve from current developments in neuropsychiatric research, such as real-time imaging and neurofeedback, which is used in therapy.

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