Understanding and Recognizing symptoms of Anxiety

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder** (GAD), is characterized by persistent, excessive, and unrealistic worry about everyday things. People with the disorder experience exaggerated worry and tension, even when there is no apparent reason for concern. They anticipate disaster and are overly concerned about money, health, family, work, or other issues. GAD is diagnosed when a person worries excessively about a variety of everyday problems for at least 6 months. Physical symptoms of GAD include the following:

- muscle tension
- fatigue
- restlessness
- difficulty sleeping
- irritability
- edginess
- gastrointestinal discomfort or diarrhea

GAD affects 6.8 million adults, or 3.1% of the U.S. population, in any given year. Women are twice as likely to be affected.

Although the exact cause of GAD is unknown, there is evidence that biological factors, family background, and life experiences, particularly stressful ones, play a role. When the anxiety level is mild, people with GAD can function socially and be gainfully employed, although they may avoid some situations because they have the disorder. When anxiety is severe, some people can have difficulty carrying out their daily activities.

**Panic disorder** is diagnosed in people who experience sudden, seemingly out-of-the-blue panic attacks (also known as anxiety attacks) and are preoccupied with the fear of a recurring attack. Panic attacks occur unexpectedly, sometimes even during sleep. A panic attack is defined as the abrupt onset of intense fear that reaches a peak within a few minutes and includes at least four of the following symptoms:

- a feeling of imminent danger or doom
- the need to escape
- heart palpitations
- sweating
- trembling
- shortness of breath or a smothering feeling
- a feeling of choking
- chest pain or discomfort
- nausea or abdominal discomfort
- dizziness or lightheadedness
- a sense of things being unreal, depersonalization
- a fear of losing control or "going crazy"
- a fear of dying
- tingling sensation
- chills or heat flush

About six million American adults experience panic disorder in a given year. Since many of the symptoms of panic disorder mimic those of illnesses such as heart disease, thyroid problems, and breathing disorders, it is common for persons to mistake a panic attack for a life-threatening illness. If you recognize these symptoms in you or a loved one you can contact Mercy EAP services at (319) 398-6694 or toll-free at (800) 383-6694 for confidential services.

*Resources are from ADAA Anxiety Disorders Association of America, and NIMH National Institute of Mental Health*
Understanding and Recognizing symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress

Posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is a serious potentially debilitating condition that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a natural disaster, serious accident, terrorist incident, sudden death of a loved one, war, violent personal assault such as rape, or other life-threatening events. Most people who experience such events recover from them, but people with PTSD continue to be severely depressed and anxious for months or even years following the event.

Facts

- 7.7 million Americans age 18 and older have PTSD.
- 67 percent of people exposed to mass violence have been shown to develop PTSD; a higher rate than those exposed to natural disasters or other types of traumatic events.
- People who have experienced previous traumatic events run a higher risk of developing PTSD.
- PTSD can also affect members of the military:

PTSD Military Statistics

Since October 2001, about 1.6 million U.S. troops have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Approximately 40,000 military members who have returned from Iraq or Afghanistan have been officially diagnosed with PTSD since 2003. The rate of PTSD is three times higher among deployed military men and women exposed to combat compared to non-deployed military. One in five military members who have returned from Iraq or Afghanistan report symptoms of PTSD or major depression, but just over half have sought treatment. PTSD is characterized by three main types of symptoms:

- Re-experiencing the trauma through intrusive distressing recollections of the event, flashbacks, and nightmares.
- Emotional numbness and avoidance of places, people, and activities that are reminders of the trauma.
- Increased arousal such as difficulty sleeping and concentrating, feeling jumpy, and being easily irritated and angered.

PTSD is diagnosed after a person experiences symptoms for at least one month following a traumatic event; however symptoms may not appear until several months or even years later. If you recognize these symptoms in you or a loved one you can contact Mercy EAP services at (319) 398-6694 or toll-free at (800) 383-6694 for confidential services.

Resources are from The Naval Health Research Center, RAND Corporation, US Department of Defense, and the ADAA Anxiety Disorders Association of America