



## **Media Release Public Relations**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Date: September 28, 2007

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### **JSU, AKA to host town hall meeting on mental health**

(JACKSON, Miss.) – The economic impact of mental illness will be the focus of a town hall meeting at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 9 at the Jackson Medical Mall's center court.

The event is hosted by Jackson State University's Southern Institute for Mental Health Advocacy, Research and Training, School of Social Work in the College of Public Service. The Rho Lambda Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. also is a host.

Before the town hall meeting, emotional wellness vendors, depression and health screenings, and bipolar awareness information will be available free to the public from 1-5 p.m.

Safiya Omari, director of JSU's SMHART Institute, said most people don't realize the economic toll an employee's mental illness takes on the workforce and the health care system.

"If they're not in treatment, they are less productive, they may miss more time from work, or they may not even be a part of the workforce because their illness is unmanaged," said Omari, an associate professor of social work and health sciences.

"Because insurance companies don't typically pay as much for mental health services, people don't want to go in their pockets and pay for them. The burden of untreated mental illness impacts all of us. "

Panelists for the town hall meeting include:

- Dr. Mardi Allen, Mississippi Department of Mental Health;
- Patricia Battle, family member of person living with mental illness;
- Dr. Nancy L. Bryant, G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center;

- Shirley Montgomery, National Alliance for Mental Illness, Mississippi chapter;
- Tumutual Norton, Mississippi Department of Mental Health;
- Bishop Jeffrey Stallworth, Word and Worship Church.

Montgomery knows what mentally ill people go through, especially when seeking employment. The executive director of NAMI-MS is bipolar, or manic-depressive, and suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder.

“Employers don’t understand that people with mental illness usually have high IQs and are very creative, but if they’re not on the right medication, they can’t focus,” she said.

A number of famous people had bipolar disorder, Montgomery explained. They include President Abraham Lincoln, politician Winston Churchill, scientist Isaac Newton, astronaut Buzz Aldrin, artist Vincent van Gogh and actress Patty Duke.

Montgomery said part of her efforts to educate people about mental illness is making bipolar awareness information available before the town hall meeting.

Bipolar is a common mental illness, she said. “There are more people with mental illness than heart and cancer patients combined.”

In addition to bipolar awareness information, participants can receive free, anonymous depression screenings from the Mental Health Association of the Capital Area. The association is offering the written screenings to coincide with the 17<sup>th</sup> annual National Depression Screening Day on Oct. 11 and its Stop A Suicide Today campaign.

On-site clinicians will assess the written depression screening tools and offer referrals to treatment programs, said Sylvia Thomas, the association’s executive director.

Nearly three quarters of Americans believe that suicide is preventable, yet only 19 percent of Americans are aware that most suicides are a result of mental illness, according to a recent public opinion poll released by Screening for Mental Health Inc. in Massachusetts.

“All of us should try to do anything we can do to further educate the community to decrease the stigmas associated with mental health,” Thomas said. “With the screenings, maybe we can stop someone on that day from committing suicide.”

For more information about the town hall meeting, call JSU's SMHART Institute at 601-979-1536. For details about the National Depression Screening Day, visit [www.mentalhealthscreening.org](http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org).

**-JSU-**

**About Jackson State University**

Jackson State University, founded in 1877, is a historically black, high research activity university located in Jackson, the capital city of the state of Mississippi. Jackson State's nurturing academic environment challenges individuals to change lives through teaching, research and service. Officially designated as Mississippi's Urban University, Jackson State continues to enhance the state, nation and world through comprehensive economic development, health-care, technological and educational initiatives. The only university in the Jackson metropolitan area, Jackson State is located near downtown, with three satellite campuses throughout the city. For more information, visit [www.jsums.edu](http://www.jsums.edu).