We know that the dark days of winter seem to lead some people to feel depressed. This past holiday season, even with all the parties and festivities, many people experienced depression. Over a lifetime, as many as one in five Americans will be affected by depression. Many famous writers, actors/actresses, singers, and sports figures deal with depression and other mood disorders. Such persons include Jim Carrey, Ashley Judd, Michelangelo, Georgia O’Keeffe, Michael Crichton, William Faulkner, Sara McLachlan, Ray Charles, Dwight Gooden, Monica Seles, and Barbara Bush.

“Even when Stephane Richer was doing what he liked best, playing hockey, he was unhappy,” wrote Damian Cristodero of the St. Petersburg Times. Stephane Richer, the right wing for the Pittsburgh Penguins, admitted his lifelong battle with depression became so severe that he contemplated suicide. “More than once he said he climbed into his Porsche 911 intending on ending his life. ‘Oh, yeah, going 140 mph,’ Richer told Pittsburgh’s Tribune-Review. ‘I didn’t hit anything. I just kept going. When you get home and realize it, that’s when you start crying. You shake. You’re scared like, ‘What am I doing?’”

Richer took sometime off from the NHL, but he has been back since November 2001 and he is working through his illness effectively. “I see every day to another day. I enjoy it. Even if I have a tough time, I say, ‘Hey I’m lucky I’m back in the NHL.’” (Damian Cristodero. “Richer recovering from depression.” St. Petersburg Times November 11, 2001).

Having depression doesn’t mean that a person is weak, or a failure, or isn’t really trying; you don’t just “snap out” of depression. It is more than feeling sad or “blue”. Transient feelings of unhappiness and brief periods of sadness are common, especially when associated with disturbing life events, such as financial problems or death of a loved one. However, a pervasive feeling of sadness that lasts for weeks, months or even years is a sign of depression. Symptoms of depression include:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, pessimism, guilt or worthlessness
- Loss of interest in once pleasurable activities
- Changes in sleep and eating habits
- Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling “slowed down” or tired all the time
- Restlessness, irritability
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide

If you identify these signs in yourself or are concerned about someone else, it is worthwhile to consult with the Counseling Center or other health professional. There is much that can be done to help depression.