

Dear Center Director,

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) is a serious and complex medical disorder that affects 800,000 Americans. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has recognized the need for greater awareness and understanding of this condition by health care professionals and the general public. I serve as the representative of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to the DHHS CFS Advisory Committee and am writing to inform you of several opportunities to learn more about this illness and its potential impact on the patient community you serve.

You may be seeing patients with CFS in your center, whether you are familiar with the diagnosis or not. Although women are at greatest risk, men and adolescents can get CFS too. Hispanics appear to be at greater risk than Caucasians or African-Americans, as are people of lower socioeconomic status as compared to those with higher incomes. Researchers at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have documented that fewer than 20 percent of persons with CFS have been diagnosed by a health care professional, underscoring the need for education about the detection, diagnosis and treatment of CFS.

CFS is characterized by incapacitating fatigue (experienced as profound exhaustion and extremely poor stamina), problems with information processing and memory, flu-like symptoms, widespread pain in the joints and muscles, dizziness, nausea, sleep disorders and numerous other symptoms. It affects the brain and multiple body systems, can be very debilitating and can last for many years. There is no definitive diagnostic test; diagnosis requires a thorough medical history plus physical and mental status examinations. Laboratory tests are used to identify underlying or contributing conditions that require treatment. The goal of treatment is to reduce or alleviate symptoms and improve the patient's ability to participate in previously well-tolerated activities.

The CDC supports educational opportunities for providers to learn more about this challenging condition. Enclosed please find a handy Resource Guide, the official case definition and a recent issue of a newsletter, the *CFS Research Review*, geared to providers. A free self-study course for primary care providers is available in several formats: web-based (www.cfids.org/treatcfs), print, DVD and video. Continuing education credits (CME, CNE, CEUs) are provided to those who complete the course. A similar course for allied health professionals is in the late stages of development. To request additional information, please complete the enclosed reply card and drop it into the mail.

Thank you for considering how these opportunities may help you better serve your patients and community.

Sincerely,

William A. Robinson, M.D., M.P.H.
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Chief Medical Officer
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