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“60 Minutes” Segment on Antidepressants "Irresponsible and Dangerous"

ARLINGTON, Va. (Feb. 22, 2012) — A segment, aired Sunday night on CBS's “60 Minutes,” claiming there is no effective difference between antidepressants and placebos is, “...not just wrong, but irresponsible and dangerous reporting,” said the President of the American Psychiatric Association John Oldham, M.D.

The story, which centers around a study conducted by psychologist Irving Kirsch, Ph.D., claims that placebos are just as effective as antidepressants in the treatment of depression even though Kirsch’s conclusions were widely discredited by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), European Medicine Agency (EMA), and clinical psychiatrists. Jeffrey Lieberman, M.D., a psychiatrist and world-renowned expert on psychopharmacology noted that, “Kirsch has badly misinterpreted the data and his conclusion is at odds with common clinical experience. He has communicated a message that could potentially cause suffering and harm to patients with mood disorders.” Dr. Lieberman went on to say, “There is abundant evidence that supports the efficacy of antidepressants above and beyond the effects of placebo.”

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) acknowledges medications aren't always the first choice in treating depression and the current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) recognizes that depression occurs with differing levels of severity. The APA's Treatment Guidelines on depression recommend psychotherapy first for mild to moderate depression, and only after this approach falls short should the physician decide whether or not antidepressants are needed in conjunction with psychotherapy.

The APA's claims on the effectiveness of antidepressants are supported and documented through the work of the Food and Drug Administration, which is responsible for drug licensing in the United States. The FDA carefully reviews years of studies before making the decision to approve medications for specific treatments and have consistently approved and upheld the effectiveness of various antidepressant medications.

Dr. Oldham concluded saying, “It is unfortunate that ‘60 Minutes’ has provided its viewers with highly misleading information, and I encourage everyone taking antidepressants to talk with your doctor before making any changes.”

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at www.psych.org and www.HealthyMinds.org.

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