



Eating Disorders – Notes from the Parish Nurse

February 23 – March 4, 2014 is NEDAwareness Week which is sponsored by the National Eating Disorders Association. “Eating disorders are serious illnesses that can be life-threatening. They are also extremely complex illnesses, arising from a variety of biological, psychological, and social factors.” These disorders include “extreme emotions, attitudes, and behaviors surrounding weight and food issues.” They can affect one’s health, productivity, and relationships.

There are three main types of eating disorders with a fourth more general type. They are: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder (BED), and eating disorders not otherwise specified (ED-NOS). In particular with anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, prompt, intensive treatment improves chances of recovery. Included here will be an overview of these two illnesses. For more information, check out the following website: www.nationaleatingdisorders.org.

Anorexia nervosa is characterized by excessive weight loss and self-starvation. Whole body systems and organs are affected by this disorder: heart, bones, muscles, kidneys, skin, and hair. Women and girls comprise 90-95% of anorexia nervosa sufferers. In America between 0.5-1% of women suffer from this disorder.

Warning Signs of Anorexia Nervosa

- Dramatic weight loss
- Preoccupation with weight, food, calories, fat grams, and dieting
- Refusal to eat certain foods (no carbohydrates etc.)
- Anxiety about gaining weight or being fat
- Denial of hunger; avoiding mealtime
- Excessive, rigid exercise regimens
- Withdrawal from usual friends and activities

Bulimia nervosa is characterized by “a cycle of bingeing and compensatory behaviors such as self-induced vomiting designed to undo or compensate for the effects of binge eating.” Recurrent binge-and-purge cycles can damage the digestive system, affect the heart, possibly rupture the esophagus, and cause tooth decay. About 80% of bulimia nervosa patients are female. It affects 1-2% of adolescent/young adult women populations.

Warning signs of Bulimia Nervosa

- Evidence of binge eating (finding wrappers and containers from large amounts of food)
- Evidence of purging behaviors (frequent trips to the bathroom after meals and signs or smells of vomiting)
- Rigid, excessive exercise regimen
- Staining of teeth
- Schedules that allow time for binge-and-purge sessions
- Calluses on knuckles from self-induced vomiting

If anyone you know is suffering from any of the above symptoms or warning signs, seek help immediately. The problem will not go away on its own.