

Depression a key factor in health of Parkinson's patients: study

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Researchers add that it is difficult to diagnose because movement disorder masks symptoms.

(HealthDay)—Depression is the most important determinant of the health status of people with Parkinson's disease, according to early findings from a large study of Parkinson's patients.

Parkinson's is a [brain disease](#) that affects muscle and causes tremors, muscle rigidity and slowed movement. It's believed that about half of Parkinson's patients experience some form of depression at some point, and research suggests that depression and anxiety are more common in Parkinson's patients than in patients with other [chronic diseases](#).

The early findings from the Parkinson's Outcomes Project were released Wednesday by the National Parkinson Foundation and suggest that the

impact of depression on the [health status](#) of Parkinson's patients is almost twice that of the movement problems associated with the disease.

The researchers also noted that depression can be difficult to diagnose in Parkinson's patients because many common disease symptoms, such as fatigue and masked [facial expressions](#), may hide [mood changes](#). Studies show that it is common for depression to be undiagnosed or under-treated in Parkinson's patients.

Based on these new findings, the National Parkinson Foundation recommends that doctors screen Parkinson's patients for depression at least once a year, and that patients discuss any mood changes with a health care professional.

When going to doctors' appointments, a patient should be accompanied by a family member who can provide information about any mood changes they've noticed in the patient.

The Parkinson's Outcomes Project began in 2009 and includes more than 5,500 Parkinson's patients in the United States and three other countries.

"Routine aspects of care are rarely studied, so this research is invaluable in proving that there are vast disparities in Parkinson's treatment and showing which aspects of care really work," Dr. Matthew Stern, of the University of Pennsylvania, who is also president-elect of the Movement Disorder Society, said in the news release.

"For example, this latest data demonstrates how important it is to quality care to refer patients for multi-faceted treatment of depression," he added.

More information: We Move has more about [Parkinson's disease](#).

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