

Quick test can help spot depressed teenagers, researcher finds

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Sharolyn Dihigo, a nurse practitioner and clinical assistant professor in the UT Arlington College of Nursing, recently examined available research to determine whether nurse practitioners and others in primary care settings should add a mental health screening. Credit: UT Arlington

A few minutes spent filling out a widely accepted mental health assessment in a health care provider's waiting room could make a big difference for some teenagers suffering from depression, according to new study from a nursing researcher at The University of Texas at Arlington.

Sharolyn Dihigo, a [nurse practitioner](#) and clinical assistant professor in the UT Arlington College of Nursing, recently examined available research to determine whether nurse practitioners and others in primary care settings should add a mental health screening to well visits for

teenage patients. Her conclusion was that a simple paper test called a CES-DC would be a reliable, quick way of determining whether the practitioner should refer a teen for mental health support.

"Getting teens treatment when they need it is essential and has potentially life-saving benefits," said Dihigo, who is also interim director of UT Arlington's Doctor of Nursing Practice program. "Providing this test while a family waits for their appointment can overcome hesitation to talk about the feelings and behaviors linked to depression and lead to treatment success."

The study, called "Use of Screening Tools for Depression in Adolescents: An Evidence-based Systematic Review," appears in the May issue of *Women's Healthcare: A Clinical Journal for NPs*, a new peer-reviewed, online journal from the National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health. It is available here: <http://npwomenshealthcare.com/>.

Nationally, it's estimated that five to 20 percent of adolescents suffer from [depression](#), but many don't receive the treatment they need. Both the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners and the American Academy of Pediatrics have promoted screening for [mental health](#) problems in primary care.

CES-DC is short for Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children. It is free and does not require extra training for those who administer the screening. It contains 20 questions about how much children experienced sleeplessness or unhappiness in the past week.

To complete her paper, Dihigo reviewed 14 studies done previously by other researchers. She is also working on a paper describing a pilot project that put these methods into action in her own clinic.

"Dr. Dihigo's [systematic review](#) of available evidence has identified a low-cost, simple assessment that she can confidently recommend because she has used it in her clinical practice," said Jennifer Gray, interim dean of the UT Arlington College of Nursing. "In combining research and practice, she is doing what we all aspire to do—make a difference in the lives of patients."

Provided by University of Texas at Arlington

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