By EARL WATT

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For some, the holiday season and New Year has been a time of celebration and of looking forward to a prosperous future.

For others, it may highlight the loss of a loved one, or the feeling of being alone.

Trying to deal with these issues alone with the hope that the feeling will just go away might lead to more serious issues according to Southwest Guidance Center Executive Director Jim Karlan.

“One of the things about depression people have to understand is that it is one of the leading medical issues in the U.S. and in the world, one of those things people would rather not talk about,” Karlan said.

“Three major issues by 2020 that will be biggest medical problems — heart disease, diabetes and clinical depression.”

The negative stigma attached to depression is what keeps many from seeking treatment.

But the issue is similar to any physical condition, Karlan said, and it can be treated.

“If depression is not treated, it won’t go away by itself, especially deep depression,” Karlan said.

If depression goes untreated, medical and business health costs can increase.

“Billions of dollars in lost business associated with employees who have to take off because they didn’t catch depression and have to take a leave or have to be let go because they cannot perform,”

Karlan said.

Although the holidays bring excitement, the bills start coming in January, the economy at the national level is in recession, and these events can trigger early stages of depression.

“People get to the point they feel trapped,” Karlan said. “They let it go so long, and it takes a toll.”

But depression is a medical problem, not the inability to handle tough life issues, according to Karlan.

“It is an imbalance which can be caused by problems, stress, or illness, and can not always be righted by gritting your teeth and thinking you will feel better,” he said. “It needs therapy and possibly medication.”

Men in particular struggle with depression. While women attempt suicide four times more often than men, men commit suicide four times more often.

“For women, it is an unconscious call for help,” Karlan said. “For men, often they are so depressed they are past the point of no return, and they have more lethal ways.”

There are signs of depression that could help loved ones get involved. When the quality of work begins to decline, or a person begins to withdraw, these could be signs of depression. If grades drop unexpectedly, or there is an overwhelming sense of boredom that leads to withdrawal, these, too, could be signs of depression.

Giving away prized possessions is another sign, one that may indicate a decision has been made.

There are also some other illnesses that may cause the same characteristics as depression, and Karlan recommended that the first step to take is to see a medical doctor.

“If you have a severe thyroid problem or other certain types of disfunctions can mimic symptoms of depression,” Karlan said. “It is always important to go to a physician and get a good physical check- up. Find out if it is an infection or other things that might be the cause of feelings of being down or can’t concentrate or sleep well.”

Another type of depression caused in the winter is seasonal affective disorder, or SAD.

“It comes from being inside and not getting enough sunlight,” Karlan said. “There’s not anything bad going on in their lives. They’re doing normal daily things. Some people are more susceptible to Seasonal Affective Disorder. Most people in winter time, if there’s not a lot of sunshine, even if it gets cold, when the sun comes out, people should bundle up and get as much sunshine as they can. If we are having a difficult winter, just sunshine hitting your skin can lessen or help avoid a certain type of depression known as SAD.”

SAD can also intensify other forms of depression. When the weather improves and people do not naturally feel more upbeat, this can be a sign of depression.

“In winter time people tend to get a little energy loss,” Karlan said. “We all need sunshine and are affected by it.”

The key is that depression is treatable, and it is not the social stigma that may be presented in movies.

Anyone who believes they may have depression or are concerned about someone they know who might be exhibiting signs of depression can call the Southwest Guidance Center at 624-8171.