



Press Release

## **Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health and The Psychiatric Association of Thailand commemorate World Bipolar Day with “Stand Up for Bipolar” Campaign**

The World Health Organization (WHO) states bipolar disorder is the disease with the third highest number of Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) and a higher risk of suicide among mental disorders. The lifetime prevalence of suicide attempts in patients with bipolar disorder is between 25.6% and 42%, while 10 – 20% of them die from suicide. Suicidal behaviors are associated with the degree of depression severity and requires the right treatment and medications. In Thailand, a lack of understanding of this mental illness has led to only one percent of the patients receiving the treatment. All related parties in Thailand need to find a way to manage mental illnesses, including bipolar disorder, along with raising public awareness.

**Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Health, Anutin Charnveerakul**, as chairman of the event said, “Mental health should put into a spotlight for public discussion and acknowledgement and World Bipolar Day will reflect us on connection, outreach, and advocacy for Bipolar disorder. Patients with bipolar disorder are considered the capable persons who are not inferior to other people. It will help patients with Bipolar disorder to accept the treatment and regain control of their lives as mental illness is like any other medical illness.”

**Director of the Department of Mental Health, Panpimol Vipulakorn, M.D.**, said “The Department of Mental Health aims to enhance the quality of life for bipolar patients. Bipolar disorder is found in approximately 1.5% - 5% of Thai population. The main cause of bipolar disorder is a malfunction of neurotransmitters in the brain and may occur in people with accumulated stress, altering the patient's habits or personality. While the main symptom of this disorder is the mood fluctuation between mania or hypomania and major depressive episode, or just only mania. The symptoms at each stage can last for weeks or even months. The continued treatment is the key of controlling symptoms and reducing the rate of recurrence. However, the family plays an important role in caring for patients to be able to live a normal life in society and encourages patients to follow the treatment plan and avoid triggers for relapse. It is, therefore, extremely important that caregivers are aware and have full understanding of bipolar care and capability to take care of the patient. This will help patients to live life at fullest potential in the community.

**Marine Queniart-Stojanovic, General Manager, Sanofi Thailand** said “Sanofi is humbly honored to have an opportunity to work in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health and The Psychiatric Association of Thailand in empowering the mental health communities in Thailand through World Bipolar Day initiative. It reinforces our commitment to raise public awareness about mental health and bipolar disorder. It is crucial that each and everyone of us has a role to help fight the disease alongside patients and caregivers. I believe that Through the collective efforts made by all parties, we will be able to improve the quality of life for Thai bipolar patients and mental healthcare.”

**President of the Psychiatric Association of Thailand, Professor Chawanun Charnsilp, M.D.**, revealed that “There are 10 million mental health patients in Thailand and around 1 million of them have bipolar disorder, but only one percent of them receive treatment. People with bipolar disorder usually begin to show symptoms when they reach adolescence. Those who do not realize may think of the symptoms



as common teen mood swings. In some cases, a person with bipolar depression may not mention manic symptoms, leading to a misdiagnosis as major depressive disorder. A wrong diagnosis averagely delays patients from getting appropriate treatment for 11 years. Bipolar disorder can occur at any age, but it often develops between the ages of 15 and 19, and then between 20 and 24. Half of the patients experience their first symptoms before they turn 20. As it is considered a chronic illness with high relapse rates of 70% - 90%, Thailand needs to accelerate the development of systematic mental health management, including the focus on self-management for patients with mental health problems. So far, the provided support has lacked an effective follow-up system, the stimulation of skills to be continuously used in real situations, and resources to support patients when they are dealing with problems at home. Inappropriate self-management can lead to more severe symptoms and an increased relapse rate.

Studies also show problem-solving training can help patients reduce the severity of bipolar disorder. Importantly, family members play a major role in supporting patients to overcome negative feelings. Treatments for bipolar disorder involve medication in combination with psychosocial treatments such as cognitive behavioral therapy, interpersonal psychotherapy, psychoeducation, and family-focused therapy. The literature review found that the right combination of psychoeducation and medication can minimize the severity of bipolar disorder, and prevent relapse effectively. Another issue to be aware of is the personal opinions about bipolar where often creates misconception as seen on television or media channels. Making jokes about bipolar can send inaccurate messages to the audience, and those with bipolar disorder may feel ashamed and may be less likely to be open about what they are dealing with. It prevents them from seeking help when they need it.

**Kriangkraimas Pojanasunthorn, as known as DJ Kendo**, shared the story of his suffer from bipolar disorder, hoping to encourage and inspire those who are now dealing with bipolar disorder and other mental illnesses. “Bipolar patients should not feel ashamed or embarrassed to get a treatment, reiterating that the illness is controllable.” He also admitted he was not aware of his early symptoms until the day he physically harmed himself. At that point, he was conscious but could not stop as he was feeling utterly worthless. He then realized the severity of his symptoms and sought help from a psychiatrist. The treatment took 5 consecutive years to bring back his normal life. He added that “I urge the public and government to create a better understanding about bipolar and should be given the opportunity of returning to a normal life.

Nowadays, we can provide education and monitor the results of treatment through new media with technological advancements. It enables mutual learning among patients, their family members and medical personnel through online discussions and telemedicine. These online channels help save time and travel costs. Today’s technology plays an important role in the medical field. It improves the follow-up of patients with mental illnesses. Every factor poses the challenges and future of treatment for bipolar disorder. However, it still requires collaborative efforts from patients, their families, and the public to foster a positive change towards bipolar patients.

#####

**For more information, please contact:**

Khuntira Natvatananon

PR Senior Consultant

Tel: 094 154 5698

E-mail: khuntira4pr@gmail.com



**Photos**

