

# Focusing on eating disorders

## Williamsburg Place welcomes expert to March 26 forum

By Ann Efimetz

WILLIAMSBURG — Dr. Kimberly Dennis, the medical director of Timberline Knolls Residential Treatment Center in Chicago, will present a workshop at The Farley Center at Williamsburg Place designed to focus attention on the growing problem of eating disorders.

“Eating Disorder and Addiction Similarities: Using the 12-Step Recovery Model for Eating Disorder Treatment,” will examine the comparable and disparate characteristics between eating disorders and other addictions.

According to Eating Disorder Clinic.org, some 8 million people are affected by an eating disorder, seven million of them, women.

Eating disorders, including anorexia nervosa and bulimia, can be life threatening. Years of starvation, bingeing and purging can take their toll on every major system of the body including the heart.

It is estimated that 5-10% of anorexics die within ten years of developing the disease. Up to 20% die within 20 years of developing the disease. Only half of anorexics ever recover.

That’s why it is so important for parents, health professionals and family members to recognize the symptoms and reach out for help if needed.

Although 90% of those who have eating disorders are women between the ages of 12 and 25, according to Dennis, the number of middle age women presenting at the center for treatment is on the rise.

“I think the reason for that may be the decreased stigma,” Dennis said in a recent phone interview.



“We are progressing as a society with education and prevention and access to treatment. There is also less denial around eating disorders today than 10 or 20 years ago.”

Dennis said the workshop will focus on similarities and differences between eating disorders and other addictions.

One of the main components examined will be the loss of control those with eating disorders feel in their personal lives which contributes to the development of the problem.

She believes that the more awareness that can be raised regarding eating disorders, the more chance people will have to seek help.

“I want to help people have a greater sense of access to care,” she said.

She said that often those with eating disorders may not look for help at 12-step meetings. When someone has a drinking problem, usually Alcoholics Anonymous is recommended as part of the recovery process.

Those with eating disorders may benefit from a program like Overeaters

Anonymous, which although is generally associated with those who are overweight, focuses on helping people curb compulsive eating.

“Every anorexic or bulimic eats compulsively, whether that compulsion is not eating or bingeing and purging or having rules around eating,” she explained.

She said society’s continued emphasis on weight, especially on women’s weight contributes to the problem.

“Most of what the media puts out there is detrimental to developing a healthy self image for women and men,” she said.

Dennis said she is excited about coming to Williamsburg Place to do the workshop and hopes it will empower people to get

help.

“Making all of it speakable is a very important and therapeutic first step,” she said. “I have come across many patients who I have asked how they decided to help. They tell me that they have read

an article or some other piece that opened their eyes. People need to know that these are treatable diseases, but people don't get well on their own. There is hope. They can live happy healthy abundant lives."

**More** — *The workshop is scheduled 9 a.m.-noon, Friday, March 26 at The Farley Center at Williamsburg Place on Mooretown Road. Call Gina Thorne at 565-0106 for more information.*

