



APPRECIATED: Anne Rajcoomar, Sadag project co-ordinator for rural and outreach projects thanks Lilian Dube for speaking out about her depression.

Breaking bipolar myths

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BEST known for her work on TV, actress and two-time breast cancer survivor, Lilian Dube, partnered with the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (Sadag) to break the stigma around mental health, particularly bipolar disorder in the black community.

According to the World Health Organisation, bipolar disorder is the sixth leading cause of disability in the world. Previously known as manic depression, bipolar disorder is a mental illness marked by extreme shifts in mood ranging from a manic (high) to a depressive (low) state.

A person with mania will feel excited, impulsive, euphoric and full of energy. The depressive episodes might bring on deep sadness and hopelessness and, if left untreated, could lead to thoughts of suicide.

Sometimes the shifts in mood can be severe. At other times, one might experience a normal mood between episodes of depression and mania.

In commemoration of Bipolar Awareness Day on 26 May, Sadag hosted various events to help create awareness and educate the public about the disorder.

Speaking at a Bipolar Awareness Day community talk which was hosted in Diepsloot, Dube spoke candidly of her experience with depression and encouraged people to get help if they suspected they were depressed. She said, "Many times the black community laughs off any type of sickness, including mental health."

Dube added that within the black community signs of depression or bipolar disorder were usually confused with witchcraft. "As soon as you start showing signs of mental illness people automatically think that you have been bewitched," she said. Dube said it was vital that such communities were educated about mental illness.

Sadag also had its first-ever Tweet Chat on 27 May answering all questions on bipolar disorder.

If you think you have symptoms of bipolar disorder, please visit the Sadag website, www.sadag.org, fill in the bipolar disorder self-rating questionnaire and discuss the findings with your mental health expert.

Sadag offers free telephonic counselling seven days a week, 365 days a year and provides referrals to support groups and other resources.

Details: 0800 21 22 23; SMS 31393 and a counsellor will call you back.