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NATIONAL ORGANIZATION REACHES OUT TO
MILLIONS OF CHRONICALLY ILL
DURING INVISIBLE ILLNESS WEEK

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National Invisible Chronic Illness Awareness Week
September 22-28, 2003
<http://www.invisibleillness.com>

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San Diego, CA, U.S.A. (July, 2003) More than 1 in 3 Americans have a chronic condition, and despite what we may assume, 60% of those who live with daily illness or pain are between the ages of 18 and 64. The majority of chronic illness is invisible, including the 9 million people who are cancer survivors that suffer the side effects of cancer treatment.

September 22-28, 2003 is National Invisible Chronic Illness Awareness Week. The theme is "But You Look So Good!" It is a major public awareness campaign sponsored by Rest Ministries, a locally-based national Christian organization that offers a support environment for those who live with chronic illness or pain.

"Living with an illness that is invisible to those around us can often have a more devastating affect on our emotional health than the physical pain," explains Lisa Copen, 33, founder of Rest Ministries who lives with rheumatoid arthritis and fibromyalgia. "Friends and family of those with chronic illness care a great deal about what their loved ones are going through, but oftentimes the invisibility of the illness sets up an environment for misunderstandings and even doubt about the validity of the illness. We hope to increase awareness of how many people 'look great' but are hurting deeply."

Outreach includes various events: the distribution of literature, "When a Friend Has a Chronic Illness: What to Say, How to Help." Resources include "But You Look So Good: A Guide

to Understanding and Encouraging People With Chronic, Debilitating Illness and Pain." Churches across the U.S. will be participating by having various testimonies shared about living with illness. Special chat guests will be online. For a complete list of events and resources visit www.invisibleillness.com or call 888-751-7378.

"The feeling of knowing that one's illness and pain is acknowledged can have a great impact on how a person copes with living with illness," says Copen. "We hope that by recognizing that people with illness rarely feel as good as they look, they will begin to feel better understood, leading them to a more invigorating life! As a Christian organization, our goal is to use this week as an opportunity to reach out to the more than 100 million who live with chronic conditions, walk alongside them on this unexpected detour, and introduce them to the Jesus, the only true healer of their pain."

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FACT SHEET ABOUT CHRONIC ILLNESS

About Chronic Illness

- + Over 1 in 3 Americans has a chronic condition and an additional 9 million are cancer survivors with various side effects from treatment. [1]
- + Despite what we may assume, 60% of those who live with daily illness or pain are between the ages of 18 and 64. [2]
- + The divorce rate among the chronically ill is over 75 percent. [3]
- + Depression is 15-20% higher for the chronically ill than for the average person. [4] However, the significance of one's faith has shown to lower one's risk of depressive symptoms and aid one in better handling a stressful medical event. [5]
- + Various studies have reported that physical illness or uncontrollable physical pain are major factors in up to 70% of suicides [6]; and more than 50% of these suicidal patients were under 35 years of age. [7]

+ Those who use their religious faith to cope are significantly less depressed, even when taking into account the severity of their physical illness. In fact, the clinical effects of religious coping showed the strongest benefit among those with severe physical disability. Some 87 patients hospitalized with serious illness who also then suffered depression were followed over time in another study. The patients with a deep, internalized faith recovered faster from the depression, even when their physical condition wasn't improving.[8]

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About Rest Ministries, the Sponsor
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FOUNDING INFO:

Rest Ministries was established in 1997 and incorporated in 1998, as a 501[c](3); founded by Lisa Copen who has lived with rheumatoid arthritis since the age of 24 (diagnosed in 1993). Lisa was diagnosed with fibromyalgia in 1998.

FAITH:

Rest Ministries is a nonprofit, non-denominational Christian organization.

LOCATION OF OFFICE: San Diego, CA

HOW WE SERVE:

Rest Ministries currently serves individual through 175 support groups called HopeKeepers, based within churches and communities in 30 states. Approximately 2500 people receive the Rest Ministries devotional via email every morning from Rest Ministries. Additional programs/outreach include The Encouragement Club, online communities such as Share & Prayer (men and women with chronic illness), Just Men (Christian men with chronic illness), Beyond Surviving Homeschooling, Splashes of Joy (women with chronic illness & depression), message boards, Bible study chats and a Christian Doctor Database.

SOURCE OF SUPPORT:

Rest Ministries does not charge for any services. Resources, such as books and tapes are reasonably priced for those on a limited income. Rest Ministries

is supported by donations and revenue from resource sales. They are currently seeking grant funding and church support.

VOLUNTEERS:

Rest Ministries volunteers, nearly all of whom have at least one chronic illness, donate over 2000 hours per month. To volunteer, call 888-751-7378.

ABOUT OUR NAME:

Rest Ministries is based on the verse Matthew 11:28, "Come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."

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REFERENCES:

- [1] (Chronic Care in America: A 21st Century Challenge, a study of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.), American Cancer Society.
- [2] *ibid.*
- [3] National Health Interview Survey
- [4] Rifkin, A. "Depression in Physically Ill Patients," *Postgraduate Medicine* (9-92) 147-154.
- [5] Pressman P., Lyons J.S., Larson D.B., Strain, J.J. "Religious belief, depression, and ambulation status in elderly women with broken hips." *American Journal of Psychiatry* 1990; 147(6): 758-760.
- [6] Mackenzie TB, Popkin MK: "Suicide in the medical patient." *Intl J Psych in Med* 17:3-22, 1987
- [7] Michalon M: *La psychiatrie de consultation-liaison: une etude prospective en milieu hospitalier general.* *Can J Psychiatry* (In French) 38:168-174,1993
- [8] References: Kendler, K.S., Gardner, C. O., and Prescott, C.A. "Religion, Psychopathology, and Substance Use and Abuse: A Multimeasure, Genetic-Epidemiologic Study," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 1997; 154: 322-329. Koenig, Harold G., Larson, David B., and Weaver, Andrew J. "Research on Religion and Serious Mental Illness," in *Spirituality and Religion in Recovery from Mental Illness*, ed., Roger Fallott. *New Directions for Mental Health Services* 1998; (80).

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