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APA Provides Disaster and Mental Health Resources for those Impacted by the California Fires

Arlington, Va. - As devastating wildfires continue to endanger and destroy California communities, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) expresses its deepest sympathies to all those affected by these devastating events and offers tips and resources on how to minimize the effects of trauma caused by destruction and loss of life during natural disasters.

This type of natural disaster can have tremendous psychological impact on all those directly and indirectly affected. It is normal during natural disasters to experience a wide range of mental or emotional reactions, from sadness, stress and anxiety to more severe mental illness such as post traumatic stress disorder, ongoing anxiety disorders or depression.

“Our immediate concerns are for the safety and well being of the community, the firefighters, the volunteers and the medical teams who are on the front lines helping with this tragedy,” said Arshad Husain, M.D., chair of the APA Committee on the Psychiatric Dimensions of Disasters. “The devastating effects from natural disasters impact the community at large. As psychiatrists we understand this disaster can cause significant distress and pose potential threats to the mental health of all those involved in the evacuation efforts, medical treatment and fighting the fires. It is important for everyone to know that help is available and treatment does work.”

After a traumatic event has passed, the APA recommends following these steps:

1. Keep informed about new information and developments, but avoid overexposure to news rebroadcasts of the event. Be sure to use credible information sources to avoid speculation and rumors.
2. If you feel anxious, angry or sad, you are not alone. Talk to friends, family or peers who likely are experiencing the same feelings.
3. If you have contact with children, keep open dialogues with them regarding their fears of danger. Let them know that, with time, healing from a tragedy is possible, even hoped for. Talk about your ability to cope with tragedy and get through the ordeal.
4. Feelings of anxiety and sadness following a traumatic event are natural. If these symptoms continue, even after order has been restored, or if these feelings begin to overwhelm you, seek the advice of a psychiatric physician in your local community.

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The APA provides online disaster psychiatry resources that may become useful as the impact of the fires continues. Please visit our web site at <http://www.psych.org/disasterpsych/links/weblinks.cfm>.

For more information on coping with mental illnesses, visit the APA's consumer Web site: www.HealthyMinds.org.

About the American Psychiatric Association:

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose more than 38,000 physician members specialize in diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at www.psych.org and www.HealthyMinds.org.

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