

## **Awareness about mental illness; leave the shameful behind**

*By Hertz Clyde Désir*

At a recent community gathering in Chicago's South Side, Dr. Maryse Nazon, Ph.D made a presentation in which she highlighted some signs of mental illness that she urged individuals to take into consideration as warning signs.

The subject matter stemmed from a relatively long listing of human-interest topics that were selected in January of the current year. At that time, an audience made the selection in the assembly hall of the South Haitian Church of God.

As a result, Dr. Nazon and her associates, Daniel Jean and Dr. Karen Thames, Ph.D. have decided to follow up on the response they got earlier.

In terms of signs, she mentioned social isolation that has become a pattern developing in someone that used to be fairly sociable. Language that has a propensity to promote harm against oneself or someone else requires immediate attention, according to Dr. Nazon.

“Pay attention to people around you [and] major changes in their behavior,” she said.

In addition to the warning signs, Dr. Nazon has strongly recommended the audience to overcome the shame factor that prevents some from seeking professional help either for themselves or for a loved one. She's emphasized that idea several times during the conversation.

Within Hope for the Haitian Youth and the Elderly (HOHAYE) there is a team of experience professionals available to provide the necessary assistance. Of course, Dr. Nazon and her colleagues Mr. Jean and Dr. Thames will handle prospective cases that may require their expertise.

A huge part of the April 5, meeting comes from the enthusiastic spirit of the audience, which responded accordingly to the presenter throughout the two-hour or so discussion. Without getting distracted from the subject, Dr. Nazon cracked a few jokes. By the way, that part also allowed her to get the attention of her listeners even better. Intentionally or not, she used her tri-lingual skills – English, Creole and French – to her advantage and for the sake of the mixed audience that was before her.

Even as the conversation was unfolding, some individuals didn't feel ashamed to ask several questions they would typically avoid asking. In part, those questions that involved major load of stress and some disturbing thoughts proved that Dr. Nazon's advice against the stigmatization and shamefulness didn't fall into deaf ears.

In his remarks toward the end of the program, Dr. Carlo Vancol, a local physician, said “I appreciate Dr. Nazon for having the gut to address the topic of mental illness in the Haitian community.

“Mental illness is an intricate part of our health,” he added.

HOHAYE executives and volunteers’ calls for a large audience played a significant role in the success of the meeting. Announcements in different community churches motivated several dozens to attend. In fact, Grace Haitian Church and Gabaon Baptist Church stopped their regular Saturday evening activities to allow their members the freedom to go and take part in the discussion.

Dr. Nazon and the team will revisit the subject on May 24 at New Hope Haitian Church, 729 W. Howard St. Then, the audience will be divided into smaller groups to better address the need of the listeners.

For more details, visit HOHAYE’s Web site [www.hohaye.org](http://www.hohaye.org) or contact HOHAYE’s executive president Pastor Franco Valdemar at (847) 625-8421.