



National Institutes of Health
National Institute of Mental Health
6001 Executive Blvd.
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

October 5, 2006

Ms. Lynn Grefe
Chief Executive Officer
National Eating Disorders Association
165 West 46th Street, Suite 1108
New York, New York 10036

Dear Ms. Grefe:

Thank you for the opportunity to address NEDA's annual meeting on September 15. I welcome the opportunity to talk with such important stakeholders about current research supported by NIMH and about our plans for the future with respect to eating disorders. Although much progress has been made, much remains to be done. I especially welcomed the chance to hear directly from your members about their concerns and about the direct impact these brain disorders have had on their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

As requested by your members, I am including a statement that underscores that eating disorders are brain disorders and that appropriate treatment can work:

Anorexia nervosa, among the most serious of mental disorders, can be deadly for young women who get caught up in a malignant cycle of weight loss and compulsive behaviors. The mortality rate for those with anorexia nervosa is estimated at 5 per cent per decade. Research tells us that anorexia nervosa is a brain disease with severe metabolic effects on the entire body. While the symptoms are behavioral, this illness has a biological core, with genetic components, changes in brain activity, and neural pathways currently under study. Most women with anorexia recover, usually following intensive psychological and medical care.

While we have made progress, it is not enough; NIMH hopes to use the new tools I described in my talk to hasten that progress substantially. Given the suffering and loss caused by eating disorders, there is no time to lose.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas R. Insel, M.D.
Director

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of Mental Health