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VTCC Honors Child Mental Health Advocates

The Virginia Commonwealth University Virginia Treatment Center for Children Advisory Council will host its first Child Mental Health Advocacy Award Gala to promote awareness of child and adolescent mental health in Virginia.

The Child Mental Health Advocacy Award Gala is scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 27, at 7 p.m., in the VCU Scott House at 909 W. Franklin St.

In the United States, approximately 15 million children suffer from mental illness, and only 20 percent of those receive treatment. Other challenges include a limited capacity to deliver care and a lack of professionals trained in children's mental health.

Making strides toward changing the state of child mental health is Alan Kirshner, CEO of Markel Corp. He will be honored at the gala for his contributions to the education of special needs children. Virginia first lady Anne Holton is honorary chair of the event.

"Mr. Kirshner has shown dedication and leadership in developing the Faison School for children with autism spectrum disorders. Many families in the commonwealth have benefited thanks to his efforts," said [Aradhana Bela Sood, M.D.](#), professor of psychiatry and pediatrics and medical director of the [Virginia Treatment Center for Children](#) (VTCC) at the VCU Medical Center.

According to Sood, mental health is rarely discussed between young people and adults. "A child in crisis needs immediate attention and there are often delays," she said. "There is a pressing need to raise public awareness of mental health – especially in children.

"The growing knowledge of the neurobiological and genetic bases of behavior has put mental illness firmly on par with physical illness and will go a long way in reducing stigma," Sood said. "It will pave the way to explore novel and effective treatments for these disorders. "Unfortunately, many children do not receive the right type of interventions because of poor access to appropriate care," she said.

The mission of the VTCC is to improve the mental health of children and families through clinical care, research, education and public awareness.

For more information on the event, contact Delores Richards-Madikiza at 804-828-1123 or drichards-madikiza@mcvh-vcu.edu.

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