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NEWS RELEASE

Taking Control of Bipolar Disorder, Staying Well, Learning More A world first online study by UNSW and the Black Dog Institute

Australian Researchers have commenced a world first study to see if they can provide better help via the internet for people experiencing Bipolar Disorder.

Increasing numbers of people are currently accessing the internet to find out more about medical conditions and treatments. Researchers want to look at the next step – involving patients online in their ongoing care.

“The concept has wide implications for the management of mental health in the Australian and international populations. Potentially, this type of on-line help can supplement traditional health care which is already stretched to meet community needs,” said Dr Caryl Barnes, Consultant Psychiatrist with the Black Dog Institute and Chief Investigator for this study.

Researchers at the Institute and the School of Psychiatry at the [University of NSW](http://www.unsw.edu.au), in partnership with Perth based health care provider, Sentiens, are currently recruiting people with Bipolar Disorder throughout Australia to participate in the innovative online study. Participants of the study will use the secure Sentiens web-based platform to access targeted on-line materials and track their mental health.

To be eligible for the study, people with Bipolar Disorder need to be:

- Currently seeing a medical professional for treatment of their Bipolar Disorder
- On medication
- When enrolling on the study they should be either well or experiencing only mild symptoms of depression or hypomania (people with more serious symptoms will be eligible to be reconsidered once their condition has improved)
- 18 years of age and older
- Have access to the internet, a printer and a valid email address

Dr Barnes said the aim was to spend the next three months recruiting 300 people for a free 12 month trial.

People interested in participating in the trial should go online via the Black Dog Institute website (blackdoginstitute.org.au) or Sentiens.com and click on the link which explains the trial and allows them to complete the eligibility questionnaire.

“The purpose of the study is to determine if programs designed for and delivered over the internet can help people with bipolar disorder stay well,” Dr Barnes said.

“Hopefully, such programs will help reduce symptoms and rates of relapse and admissions into hospital and assist people to remain on medication.”

Professor Phil Mitchell, Head of the School of Psychiatry at the University of NSW, said a high percentage of people with Bipolar Disorder failed to follow their prescribed treatment. “We are hoping that this web-based program will help patients understand their condition better, and aid them in becoming more involved in their treatment program.”

“The program will allow participants to monitor their bipolar illness using state-of-the-art technology in what we believe is a world first in this type of research,” Professor Mitchell said.

“This project has massive implications for the management of mental health in Australia and international populations (including Depression and Anxiety). Interventions of this kind can supplement traditional health care and allow patients to become more involved with their own care,” Dr Dennis Tannenbaum, Sentiens’ Consultant Psychiatrist and Executive Chairman.

Participants will have access to a large body of information which combines psycho education with specific therapeutic techniques. These are based on cognitive behavioral and social rhythms therapy, which are designed to help people better manage their Bipolar Disorder and keep well.

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