



BLACK DOG INSTITUTE SPOTLIGHT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people today are the “vulnerable generation” when confronted with the emotional rollercoaster ride caused by depression, according to a report just released.

Professor Gordon Parker, Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute, said the physical, emotional and chemical changes that already characterise adolescence are a challenge enough for most teenagers. “To have depression on top of that can be almost unbearable,” the Professor said.

Releasing the Institute’s latest Yearly Report, Professor Parker, said there was a need for much more to be done for young people to help them know and understand what is happening and that help is at hand.

“For young people, the crushing burden of depression is made worse when there is no protective life experience, none of the wisdom that can help the rest of us comprehend and thus deal with it should we get the disorder,” Professor Parker said.

“One of the realities, fortunately, is that young people will, subject to appropriate professional management and self-management, get on top of their mood disorder.

“Of all the key messages we could choose as professionals, family members and friends, perhaps the most important ones are: ‘Thoughts are not facts: you are not alone’.”

Professor Parker said the Institute over the past 12 months had put the spotlight on youth initiatives with a number of new programs set to be implemented in coming months.

Last year the Institute produced a new book *Navigating Teenage Depression: A Guide for Parents and Professionals*, launched by the Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir. The Governor, who is herself a child psychiatrist, described the book as a beacon of hope; not only for people working with and caring for adolescents but for young people themselves.

“This is what we need; the understanding, the unlocking of that terrible black mood, getting to know where it has come from, understanding genetic possibilities, anxiety disorders that may have been masked since childhood but have dragged up into adolescence with the biological maturation of young people,” said the Governor.

Professor said other initiatives planned for 2010 included:

- An innovative school-based Youth Program, using illustrations and humour to build a bridge to communicate with young people on the issue of mood disorders
- A soon-to-be-released youth-specific website which provides an innovative way for young people, particularly in the 12 to 18 age group, to express and share their experiences with the ultimate aim of dispelling amongst young people the stigma associated with mental illness.

Professor Parker said many adolescents just haven't yet had the opportunity to learn to deal with a mood disorder. "Parents commonly enter a decision maze – worrying about when a mood change is above and beyond adolescence 'angst', when and how to intervene, how to get help and how to judge that their child is getting appropriate help," Professor Parker said.

The Institute continues to set new benchmarks as illustrated by the growth in our corporate and community partnerships, our clinical services, the education and training programs, community and rural initiatives as well cutting-edge research.

In the previous year (2008) we talked about the spectacular growth of the Institute's website. The trend continued in 2009 with the average number of website hits rising 15 percent to an average of 180,000 per month.

The Institute is constantly updating the information on the website for the public and for health professionals, with the most popular pages such as the Fact Sheets, Bipolar Disorder Self-test, Depression Explained, Depression Self-test and the Health Professionals Home Page.

The 2009 Yearly Report is available on the Institute's website:

www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

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