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BLACK DOG INSTITUTE DepEd ONLINE DEPRESSION EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Black Dog Institute today launched DepEd, an online education program to help people better understand and manage depression

This unique Black Dog Institute program challenges the current ‘one size fits all’ approach to depression with the Executive Director, Professor Gordon Parker, declaring there was a distinct need at the present time to make the assessment and management of mood disorders more sophisticated to ensure people are not over- treated or under-treated for their condition.

Based on 25 years of research and clinical experience, the Institute argues that there are multiple mood disorders – both primary and secondary depressive conditions, as well as distinctive bipolar disorders.

Professor Parker said that the Institute, along with many other Australian organisations, had helped to destigmatise the mood disorders. Such distinct and broad advocacy has almost certainly positioned Australia ahead of other nations in viewing those with a mood disorder with grace and respect; rather than grace and distancing.

In destigmatising depression, Professor Parker said a simple message had been communicated to the public and health professionals. “The inference was that depression was a single condition and highly responsive to generalist intervention – with sufferers being encouraged to attend their health practitioner and to have a high expectation of benefit,” Professor Parker said.

“Unfortunately, it has led to a lack of sophistication in diagnosis and management of mood disorders.”

The Institute had made redressing the oversimplification a high priority. The launch of this new online depression education program on its website (www.blackdoginstitute.org.au) is a first step in providing a consumer guide to better understand and manage mood disorders.

As Professor Parker explains on the website, most people experience normal depression from time to time. It usually comes with some kind of setback in life, and we feel sad and helpless resulting in our self-esteem suffering. “For most people these feelings are resolved naturally over a few hours, or a couple of days,” according to Professor Parker.

<http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/media/newsreleases/index.cfm>

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But if you have clinical depression, that is something quite different. “The depressed mood is even more severely affecting. It’s common for people to experience feelings of worthlessness and thoughts that life is not worth living,” he said.

The website, he said, looks at the three different types of clinical depression – melancholic, psychotic and non-melancholic and their subtypes. The website provide a clear understanding of each of the conditions as well as enabling people to assess their mood, using the Black Dog Institute online depression self-test.

In addition, the website includes the personal stories of people suffering from melancholic, psychotic and non-melancholic conditions.

Graeme Cowan, author of the book *Back from the Brink*, tells his story of dealing with melancholic depression.

Two women also tell their stories. Shirley suffered psychotic depression following the birth of her first child. Liz tells how she had this amazingly together life on the outside but suffered non-melancholic depression on the inside.

One of the many facets to this website also includes tips on getting health and keeping well.

Director of the Black Dog Institute’s Psychological Services, Associate Professor Vijaya Manicavasagar, talks online about the importance of seeking help for depression and what to expect from a consultation with a mental health professional.

Associate Professor Manicavasagar makes the startling revelation that 25 percent of patients consulting their GP may suffer from a mood disorder.

VISIT THE WEBSITE ON www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

FOOTNOTE: Visitors to the website will find it interesting to see the Black Dog Institute has used plant illustrations as a metaphor to describe the different types of depression. “Imagine for a moment a sick garden. While each plant may appear to have the same symptoms, such as dying flowers or shrivelled leaves, a closer inspection can reveal different reasons the plants look sick,” says Professor Parker.