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A GROUP of central western farming families has pulled together to host a function to raise awareness of depression among farmers and their rural communities.

The function will be held on Sunday, October 8, on a property near Trangie, and will feature a series of guest speakers on the subject of depression and the help available for its management.

The Family and Friends Depression Awareness Group comprises members of the Warren, Trangie, Tottenham and Gulargambone communities who have experienced the impact of depression in their family and want to take a proactive step towards finding management solutions.

The group wants to promote the services available to country people who suffer depression and build a community support network for them.

It also wants to try and promote the philosophy, particularly among rural men, that depression is treatable, it is nothing to be ashamed of, support is available and the tragedy of taking one's life is preventable.

The function is also an opportunity for community members to better understand the symptoms of depression and learn the importance of "keeping an eye" on neighbours, mates and family members with improved knowledge of those symptoms and types of treatment available.

Guest speakers on the day include Matthew Johnstone of the Black Dog Institute and author of "I had a black dog", founder of depressioNet, Leanne Pethick and head of psychological medicine at Royal North Shore hospital, Professor Chris Tennant, who also makes regular visits to Warren and Nyngan.

Dr John Burke, a retired doctor from Warren, chairs the Family and Friends Depression Awareness Group and said while depression was an Australia-wide problem it seemed greater in rural areas where it is known one person takes their own life every four days.

Dr Burke said he knows of 13 lives lost to depression in the Warren district in the past 25 years, and 12 of them were men who had ended their lives needlessly.

"Depression is a problem only evidenced when we see a life lost, but it is still bubbling away under the surface," Dr Burke said.

"Depression is definitely treatable, and by having this day we hope to educate and make more in our community aware of what depression is, what it means, and that there is help to manage the illness."

Dr Burke said there was a stigma attached to emotional illnesses which inhibited people admitting they had depression to their families, friends or colleagues and as a result those people were missing out on effective treatment.

Following the speakers a light luncheon will be held in the garden of the Austin family, "Wambianna", Trangie, who lost their son and brother, Malcolm, two years ago to depression.

Like other families in the group who have lost a loved one to depression, the Austins want to raise the awareness of depression to help people recognise the symptoms and break down the stigma associated with it, particularly in rural areas, so other families do not suffer the same tragic loss.

The function will start at 11.30 am, and is being supported by NSW Farmers Association and NSW Department of Primary Industries drought support program.

Lunch is free and bar facilities will be available.

For further details contact Dr John Burke on (02) 6847 4907 or David Wake on 6888 7586.

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

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