

NEWS RELEASE

15 April 2009

EXERCISE AS TREATMENT FOR DEPRESSION

BLACK DOG INSTITUTE



Exercise is being under-used as a treatment for depression resulting in a leading Australian authority on mood disorders calling on doctors and other health professionals to place a greater emphasis on physical activity for patients with the black dog disorder.

Described as a neglected strategy, the Black Dog Institute is joining forces with Australian sportspeople to lead a drive to raise awareness in the community and amongst health professionals on the benefits of exercise to treat some forms of depression.

John Konrads (Olympian), Brendan Capell (long distance swimmer) and David Spindler (golfer and professional caddie to some of the world's best-known golfers) helped launch the ***Exercise the Mood*** initiative today.

They were joined by the Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute, Professor Gordon Parker; Research Psychologist, Joanna Crawford; Director of the University of NSW (UNSW) Lifestyle Clinic, Chris Tzar and author, Graeme Cowan.

Speaking at the launch, Professor Parker said exercise was particularly useful for reducing depression amongst people with mild/moderate depression who were previously inactive.

"Two-thirds of Australians do not meet the minimum physical activity recommendations, and people experiencing depression have even lower levels of activity," Professor Parker said.

He said that last year the Institute conducted an innovative survey of 500 people at a major Sydney fun run (Blackmore Sydney Running Festival). The aim of the study was to examine the impact of exercise on mood and the relationship between exercise and the symptoms of depression.

This study found that while most people (95 percent) reported that exercise improved their mood, even mild symptoms of depression were associated with reduced fitness, less confidence in exercising and added obstacles to exercise.

Over 90 percent of those people surveyed with current symptoms of depression agreed that exercise "gives me more energy" and "makes me feel better if I am feeling depressed."

"This Australian study, along with recent overseas research, has demonstrated the benefits of exercise for improving mood and energy levels in depression," reported Professor Parker.

"While regular moderate exercise can be an effective way to assist some forms of depression, it can be very difficult for people experiencing depression to find the motivation to get started."

Health professionals, he said, had an important role to play in assisting depressed patients to become more active.

Professor Parker today launched the Institute's program encouraging exercise as a strategy for assisting people with depression.

He said the Institute was developing free customised educational programs and workshops for health care professionals, including GPs, psychologists and allied health professionals to assist them in using exercise as a strategy for treatment of depression.

The two hour workshop will be piloted at the Black Dog Institute, starting in July this year, while rollout will occur in 2010-2011.

Funded by the Roth Charitable Foundation, the program is being developed in collaboration with the UNSW Lifestyle Clinic.

This new initiative will include evidence-based strategies for promoting physical activity in people experiencing depression and train health professionals in:

- Current evidence for the role of exercise in the treatment of depression
- Physical activity assessment and tailored education on exercise
- Development of individualised exercise plans for depressed patients
- Identifying and overcoming barriers to exercise
- Specific strategies found to increase exercise participation, including 'motivational interviewing' counselling, written exercise prescriptions from doctors, goal setting and self-monitoring
- Referral options and relevant Medicare rebates available (e.g. referrals to exercise physiologists under Enhanced Primary Care Plans)

Brief biographical information:

- John Konrads (Olympian) was only 15 when he broke all freestyle swimming world records from 200 metres to 1500 metres
- 24-year-old Brendan Capell (Australian Open Water Swimming representative) is currently the second ranked male in World Marathon Swimming behind Bulgaria's Peter Stoychev. In August, Brendan has been invited to compete against five other champion marathon swimmers in the prestigious race across the English channel
- David Spindler (Australian golfer and caddie). David was a highly performed amateur golfer who for the past six years has been a caddie for top Australian golfers on the American PGA circuit
- Graeme Cowan (Australian Author). Graeme last year released *Back from the Brink Too*, a book that contained advice from hundreds of interviews with depression and their caregivers.

Media Inquiries:

Contact: Ian Dose (M) 0419 618 606 or email: i.dose@unsw.edu.au