

BLACK DOG INSTITUTE

GP NEWSLETTER

THINK BIPOLAR

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIAGNOSING BIPOLAR DISORDER

In the last two decades the average 10 to 15 years delay in the diagnosis of bipolar disorder has not improved. What makes bipolar disorder so difficult to diagnose?

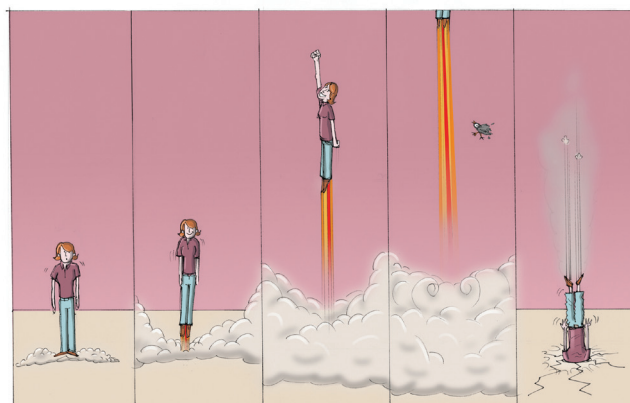
Bipolar I sufferers usually have two or three episodes of depression, usually melancholic, before their first episode of mania. Few of us will fail to make a correct diagnosis at that point.

In contrast, in bipolar II, depressive episodes are on average 39 times more frequent than hypomania, and patients with bipolar II experience many episodes of depression before the signal hypomanic episode, assuming it is recognised as such, provides the clue to their bipolarity. So already we have identified two of the contributors to delayed diagnosis – misdiagnosis as unipolar depression and failure to report or recognise hypomania when it occurs.

At diagnosis, 80% of bipolar disorder sufferers meet criteria for substance abuse. It is conceivable that this fact alone may contribute considerably to the failure to diagnose. It is always worth exploring the reasons for substance abuse. Is there any evidence that the patient may be using substances to control symptoms?

Patients with bipolar II (and Bipolar Disorder Not Otherwise Specified as DSM IV refers to this group) do not always meet the duration criteria for their episodes of mood instability and they do not always respond to antidepressant medications in the expected way. This gives them a good deal in common with patients with personality-based mood dysregulation and they may indeed have acquired a personality disorder diagnosis rather than a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. It is worth remembering that 10% of patients with bipolar disorder also meet criteria for a personality disorder. Thinking about what patients with bipolar disorder may have experienced growing up in a family with parents who may also have suffered from bipolar disorder, possibly undiagnosed, and the way in which their own undiagnosed disorder may have played havoc with their early teenage years, it is not surprising that there are personality issues present as well.

The personal stories on the Black Dog Website ([click here](#)) highlight the adversity encountered by patients riding the waves of an undiagnosed and untreated bipolar illness. No doubt you have a few stories from your own practice. Clearly improving our ability to



recognise and manage bipolar illness has the potential to alleviate a great deal of suffering and hardship.

In 2010, reporting on his findings in the Charmaine Dragun inquest, the NSW coroner stated that we “need to exclude bipolar disorder in all patients presenting with signs and symptoms of depression”. How do we do that?

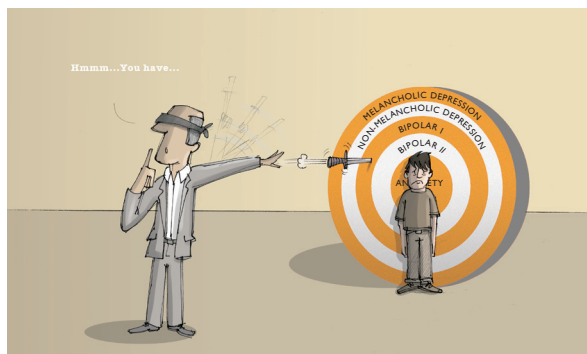
Simple screening questions about “highs” are a good place to start. Examples include:

- Have you had any periods in your life when you felt better than good, when your energy levels were very high and you did not seem to need much sleep?
- During those times did you do or say things that were out of character or that you have come to regret?
- During those times have you been inspired by exciting ideas and plans or felt “at one with the universe”?

Further assessment can include the **Mood Swings Questionnaire** on the Black Dog Website which provides a “probable bipolar” diagnosis with around 80% accuracy. For a more comprehensive assessment use the **online MAP** which includes the Mood Swings Questionnaire but also provides a whole range of other useful information which will be helpful in planning management.

The Black Dog Institute also offers a 6-hour accredited workshop for GPs on Bipolar Disorder entitled “Ups and Downs: Managing Bipolar Disorder in General Practice”

See page 3 for further details.



bipolarcaregivers.org!

www.bipolarcaregivers.org

Caring for a friend or family member who has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder can be challenging and at times overwhelming. A team from the University of Melbourne have created an outstanding on line resource for carers of people with bipolar disorder. The site called [bipolarcaregivers.org!](http://bipolarcaregivers.org) provides both a detailed overview of bipolar disorder itself together with extensive advice on caring for loved ones with bipolar including the importance of carer self-care. It trouble shoots common scenarios that may arise such as the person refusing to accept treatment, managing suicidality, dealing with manic episodes, etc. The website is beautifully presented with artwork created by people living with mental health problems and their carers.

Bipolar Gems

Diagnosis is difficult:

- 80% of patients with bipolar disorder meet criteria for substance abuse disorders at diagnosis
- It is often difficult to distinguish bipolar II from personality-based emotional dysregulation.
- Average delay in diagnosis of bipolar II disorder is 10-15 years
- Melancholic depression in a young person is a red flag for bipolar disorder
- 80% of depressive episodes in patients with bipolar disorder are melancholic, but the first episode of bipolar depression often occurs at a time of significant life stress

Bipolar II disorder is not “Bipolar Lite”:

- Depression in bipolar II can be just as severe and much more frequent than depression in bipolar I, it is the nature of the “highs” that distinguishes the two.
- The suicide rate in bipolar II is equal if not greater than in bipolar I.

Therapy is complex:

- Adjunctive psychological therapies are important in both forms of bipolar disorder
- Creating a well-being plan that addresses lifestyle factors, identifying triggers, recognising relapse symptoms and setting out an action plan improves outcomes for people with bipolar disorder.
- Click here to view the [Wellbeing Plan](#) on the BDI website.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TOOLKIT - BIPOLAR RESOURCES



The Psychological Toolkit contains numerous resources about bipolar disorder for use by GPs and their patients. These include (click on title to open page):

Resources for GPs

About bipolar disorder

Mood stabilisers

Management strategies for bipolar disorder - non-pharmacological

Resources for patients and their families

Symptoms of bipolar disorder

Treatments for bipolar disorder

Mood chart for bipolar disorder



GP WORKSHOP DATES: JANUARY - JUNE 2012

FEBRUARY

- 04 **ABC of CBT (Day 1)** Black Dog Institute
- 18 **ABC of CBT (Day 2)** Black Dog Institute

MARCH

- 03 **ABC of CBT (Day 3)** Black Dog Institute
- 11 **Perinatal Mood Disorders in Practice** Yeppoon QLD
- 25 **Dealing with Depression** Black Dog Institute

APRIL

- 28 **An Interactive Mindfulness Workshop for GPs** Black Dog Institute

MAY

- 12 **Ups & Downs: Managing Bipolar Disorder in General Practice** Black Dog Institute

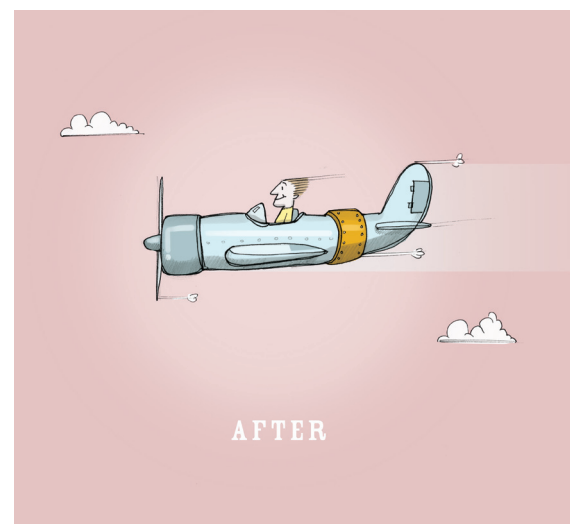
JUNE

- 02 **Dealing with Adolescent Depression** Black Dog Institute
- 23 **Perinatal Mood Disorders in Practice** Black Dog Institute

Accreditation. All our GP programs have been updated and re-accredited with the RACGP, GPMHSC and ACRRM for the 2011-2013 triennium. Please check our website for accreditation details.

To register for a program please visit our website: blackdoginstitute.org.au. For further information please email Katie at k.denton@blackdog.org.au or call 02 9382 8518.

Please note that the programs listed above are subject to confirmation. Please check our website for further dates, programs in different areas and regular updates.



Are you registered to refer to the online MAP?

If you are a medical practitioner, a registered psychologist or an accredited mental health social worker you are eligible to refer to the online MAP.

Registering gives you an access code that allows your patients to access the secure website and links them to your practice, thereby telling us where to send their MAP Report. You do need to have a separate access code for each address at which you work but there is no limit to how many you can have.

It's free to register and free to complete an assessment online.

Follow the link <http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/docs/ClinicianregistrationsMAPreferrer.pdf> to register online as a referrer.

When you receive your access code we would encourage you to get online and complete a MAP to see what the experience is like for yourself. This will be of benefit both in explaining the process to your patients and interpreting reports when you receive them.

The MAP Report provides "an invaluable second opinion" to diagnosis and opens the door to further conversation and treatment planning.

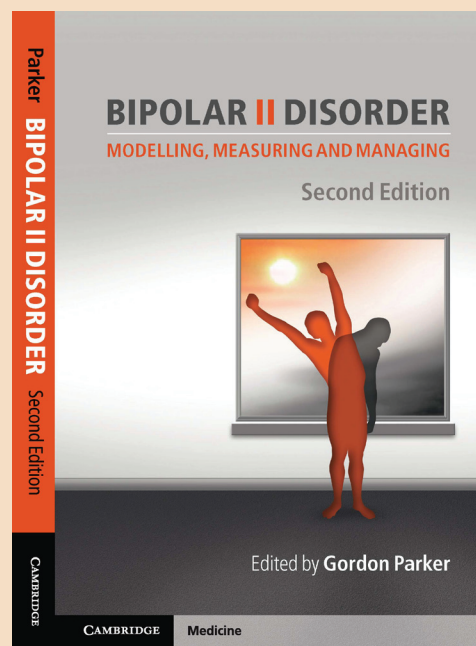


BIPOLAR II DISORDER MODELLING, MEASURING AND MANAGING

Now in its second edition, "Bipolar II Disorder" edited by Prof. Gordon Parker, is the only academic and clinical management review focusing entirely on Bipolar II. The book explores history, epidemiology, burden and neurobiology and includes extensive debate by international experts about effective management strategies.

New chapters cover comorbidity, over-represented personality styles, illness trajectories and distinguishing Bipolar II from personality-based emotional dysregulation states. The book is essential reading for health professionals managing mood disorders and informative to patients seeking information about their condition and treatment options.

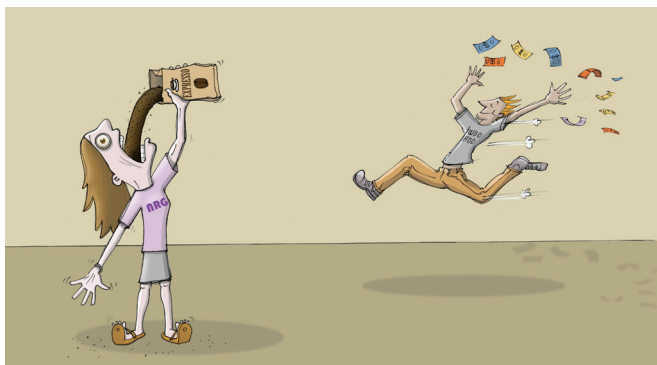
This edition is set to be released in March 2012 and is being published by Cambridge University Press in paperback.



Merry Christmas & Best Wishes for 2012

The Professional Education and Training Team at the Black Dog Institute would like to wish you all a wonderful and safe Festive Season.

The Black Dog Institute will be closed from the 20 December 2011 & will reopen on the 03 January 2012. We look forward to working with you in 2012!



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEW SOUTH WALES



BLACK DOG INSTITUTE

NEW TRIAL OF NON-MEDICATION TREATMENT FOR DEPRESSION

The University of NSW is seeking
volunteers for new clinical trials of non-
medication treatments for depression.

*Volunteers must:

- Be aged 18 years or above
- Have been experiencing feelings of depression for at least 2 weeks

Treatment involves innovative stimulatory therapies to restore brain functioning in depression. Volunteers will attend on an outpatient basis at the Black Dog Institute in Randwick, Sydney.

For more information please contact the study coordinator on:

Phone: 02 9382 3720

Email: tms@unsw.edu.au or visit the Black Dog Institute website
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

*Other selection criteria apply