



Transcript of the speech by Her Excellency, Professor Marie Bashir AC, AVO at the book launch of *'Navigating Teenage Depression: A guide for parents and professionals'*

Thank you, Professor Parker for that warm and wonderful welcome. It's always a joy to find myself again amongst my colleagues. I'd like to recognise too, and say how touched I am, that our sisters and brothers are here from the Pacific Islands. You and your dear people and your glorious territories have been on all our minds since we heard about the recent devastating earthquake and tsunami.

It's an honour to be asked to launch this book because, as Professor Parker implied, I lived and breathed and worked in this most rewarding field for about 30 years before becoming the Governor of NSW and I feel I've never left it. I feel that the insights one gets from adolescents who are depressed, learning from them and their families is truly a great privilege. I have to say that this book is a beacon of hope because it's so practical, it's written in a wonderful way that reaches out to those who want to work with adolescents, or who are already working with them, or for young people themselves if they want to read it. I can tell you that reading this book was certainly a very uplifting feeling of renewal, because all of you are aware of the very unacceptable statistics and very extensive pain, so often silent, so often dangerous, of depression in our young people which impedes their rightful happy development in a critical period of their life. Here, as we are so close to La Perouse and to so many of the important settlements, I want to record my respect for our indigenous people of our land, their ancestors and their descendants, and to remember too that so many of our young Aboriginal people suffer from depression. Young men in communities in the far north are particularly vulnerable to depression, so I'm sure that my fellow psychiatrists in the Top End will be very glad to have a copy of this volume. Particularly important is something that Kerrie and Gordon alluded to and that is the inadequate assessment, the misdiagnosis of many young people. When I was working in that field for many years, I was removing harmful misdiagnoses from young people who were coming in with a diagnosis of schizophrenia based on the assumption that they were remote and lacking in volition and motivation – they were in fact profoundly depressed. Once one got inside of that depression with them, felt the pain and understood it, and began to understand, as this book tells us, their reluctance and why they were reluctant to start talking. The impact of personality style and very often too the personality styles within the family, all of these aspects are addressed in this book in a most sensitive and accepting way. I always say, and it's a cliché, maybe some of you have heard me say this before, Australia's great problem is not water. We can do a lot to get more water from the north, we could build a pipeline (if it were oil we would), we could desalinate.....our biggest challenge is to ensure that the young people of our country are equipped, healthy and happy to go on and run this country with the great destiny facing it as a force for good in the Asia-Pacific region. My experience and I know Gordon's, Kerrie's and anyone who has the privilege of working with young people, knows that so often depressed young people are the most creative members of our society, once they are released from the bonds of that black dog depression, once they are given the opportunity to see the goodness, the talents, the potential that would be realised in them to contribute to the life of their community, or their friends, or just to feel good, then they soar like eagles and there's not one who isn't precious who we must fail. I'm preaching to the converted, this room must be full of people who not only work with our young people or young people are the world, but who feel that joy of giving them back their lives, helping them to take charge. Of course there are many ways we can do it. We can talk to you in the Pacific Islands via a satellite. I remember several years ago when telemedicine was first made

available - speaking to one another as one does on Lateline, you can link up to anywhere in the world – a young man had attempted suicide in a remote country town and we were not able to go there that minute, but we were able to hook up with practitioners and then the young man himself on a link and, interestingly, one can form, having the strengths that one derives from the insights in this book, one can even establish a relationship that's constructive and develops into a trusting relationship over these technologies that are now available to us. So we have conducted interviews such as this with people as far away as Hanoi. It's there and it's economical. 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 been dragged up into adolescence with the biological maturation of young people. It's always been my belief that this is where we so accurately can treat, before it arrives, homelessness, substance abuse, recourse to alcohol. So many young people who take those pathways are doing so to assuage their terrible depression. So, I say again, it's with a sense of privilege and gratitude that I officially launch Gordon Parker and Kerrie Eyers' splendid contribution to caring for our young people in the best possible way.

Thank you.