

NEWS RELEASE

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2009/10 BLACK DOG INSTITUTE WRITING COMPETITION TO FOCUS ON OUR SENIORS

Late Onset Depression: Finding Answers for Older People and their Carers is the challenge in the latest Black Dog Institute Writing Competition.

Professor Gordon Parker, Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute, said that while previous competitions had focused on a wide range of topics such as adolescence and depression, tackling mood disorders in the workplace and mastering bipolar disorder, the spotlight this time is on people 60 years and older who have experienced ‘late onset’ depression.

It is called ‘late onset’ when someone who has not previously had depression develops the illness as they grow older. “These older adults have lived through times when there was greater stigma associated with depression and mental illness,” he said

“I have heard it said that ‘becoming old you become invisible’. There is also a tendency for depression to make people feel invisible,” Professor Parker said, and “While elderly people may initially decline a helping hand, they are extremely appreciative of professional assistance and being heard.”

Professor Parker said that an estimated eight percent of older adults in Australia experience depression, though those experiencing late onset are a smaller proportion of this group. Depression and anxiety are also common amongst family carers of older people and the Institute is also interested in receiving accounts from them, of how they go about helping their loved one cope and how they cope themselves.

Professor Parker said depression in this age group is often not diagnosed because older adults and health care professionals may think that it is part of the normal ageing process but suicide rates have always been high amongst older people, particularly men. Depression in this age group reflects a range of biological and social factors.

This writing competition seeks to learn more about how to best assist older people with depression and to provide useful feedback and strategies for their carers generally – though the focus is particularly on those who experienced depression for the first time after the age of 60, why it might have occurred, its impact and how they handled the illness.

“For these people with late onset episodes, the trigger that brings on bouts of depression may well have been retirement, a sea change, feeling neglected by family, the result of ‘empty nesting’

(children leaving the family home), changing roles, social isolation, loss and medical/physical illness,” Professor Parker said.

“I believe older people will find it useful to hear stories from others, and what they found to be helpful in managing their depression or ‘highs’ (in the case of bipolar disorder). Hopefully, this will also lead to reducing stigma about mood disorders amongst the elderly and, at the same time, identify services that are needed to support the carers of these people,” he said.

Professor Parker observed that this was sixth Black Dog Institute writing competition in as many years. All of the competitions have resulted in the publication of books by distinguished publishing companies. The current book titled *Navigating Teenage Depression – A Guide for Parents and Professionals*, was launched by Allen and Unwin in last week. A book from the latest writing competition, with the theme of Tackling Mood Disorders in the Workplace will be published by Allen and Unwin in 2010.

“What the Institute is aiming for is to provide new insights. People have commented that most books on mood disorders have been written from the outside looking in.

Drawing together perceptions and personal accounts from those who have experienced mood disorders is allowing us to reverse this approach. ‘Inside out’ views offer rich information that assists in breaking down the mysteries of mood disorders and their management,” Professor Parker said.

The 2009/10 competition invites entries from the Australasian region. Prizes will be awarded for the three best essay entries. Essays are to be no more than 1500 words.

First Place: \$2000; Second Place \$1000 and Third Place \$500.

The closing date for receipt of entries is 31 December, 2009. Participants are required to complete an application form and forward, where possible, an electronic copy of their essay to blackdog@blackdog.org.au plus an original copy of the essay on A4 paper (paper clip/not stapled) by post, addressed to:

Black Dog Institute Writing Competition
Black Dog Institute
Hospital Road
Prince of Wales Hospital,
Randwick, NSW, 2031

To obtain an application form:

- Download from the Institute’s website www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

OR

- Call (02) 9382 4523.

In view of the nature of the competition, the Institute will also accept hand-written entries, as not all entrants will be comfortable using a computer.

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