

MEDIA RELEASE

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Black Dog Institute Researcher trialling new treatment for young people with depression

Associate Professor Colleen Loo, from the Black Dog Institute, has been awarded a \$30,000 grant from Australian Rotary Health Research Fund (ARHRF) to trial a new treatment for depressed adolescents.

With the current controversy over the use of anti-depressants in young people, transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) may prove to be a popular alternative.

"The advantages of TMS are that it seems to be quite acceptable to adolescents and their families and there appear to be very few if any associated side effects," says Dr Loo.

Parents are increasingly concerned about the side effects of medication on their children, and for some teenagers, anti-depressants simply do not work. Counselling is not always effective and the other currently available treatment of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), usually used as a last resort, requires anaesthetic and can affect memory.

It is estimated that about 20 per cent of young people will have experienced depression by the time they reach adulthood. More than normal sadness, clinical depression interferes with day-to-day functioning and is severe enough to warrant treatment.

TMS is delivered via a simple, butterfly-shaped coil held to the left side of the head to stimulate a part of the brain called the pre-frontal cortex, which is thought to be underactive in people with depression.

Participants receive a series of magnetic pulses for about 20 minutes every weekday for four weeks.

Experimental TMS trials have already shown promise in adults with depression.

"Recently the Board of Australian Rotary Health decided to focus on the mental health of children and young people when allocating future funding. Associate Professor Loo's work is one of many projects we are funding to help ease the burden of mental illness on individuals, families and the community," says Joy Gillett, CEO of ARHRF.

Combined, the Rotary clubs of Crows Nest, Mosman and North Sydney have donated over \$120,000 to the fund since its inception.

The Australian Rotary Health Research Fund is a multi-district project for Rotary in Australia, with over 1,175 Rotary clubs and 34,370 Rotarians supporting it. It is one of the largest independent medical research funds in the country. Over the past seven years the Fund has awarded more than \$9.7 million in research grants and scholarships.

For more information, see www.arhrf.org.au and www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

Contacts: Heidi Hodder 02 8837 1900 or 0402 587 552

Colleen Loo 02 9382 3720 TMSandDCS@unsw.edu.au