



TRIAL OF NEW DRUG TO FIGHT BIPOLAR DISORDER

The Black Dog Institute has issued a fresh call for volunteers to be involved in a research trial to determine if a new anti-depressant drug is an effective treatment for Bipolar II Disorder (where individuals experience ‘highs’ and ‘lows’).

The call comes as estimates show that Bipolar Disorder affects 100,000 Australians and the number is growing annually.

(Only last night, Rugby Union legend, Enrique (Topo) Rodriguez revealed in a television current affairs show that he had recently been diagnosed with Bipolar II).

(Now retired after playing 15 Tests for Argentina, 26 for Australia and one for Tahiti, “Topo” said he believed he had been suffering from the disorder for many years. He said he had only realised his condition after reading an account of the life of swimming icon John Konrads, who had been diagnosed with Bipolar II.)

Up until recently, there has been reluctance among psychiatrists to treat patients with a history of Bipolar Disorder with traditional anti-depressants, such as tricyclic antidepressants, TCAs, or monoamineoxidase inhibitors (MAOIs).

“The reluctance is due to concerns of a medication-induced ‘switch’ from depression to mania from these more powerful antidepressants,” according to the Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute, Professor Gordon Parker.

By contrast, the Institute’s research team had observed that the Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI) drugs could settle the highs and lows in those with Bipolar II, and wish to study the possibility with a new SSRI antidepressant.

Professor Parker said the Institute was looking to recruit a total of 200 males and females, between 18 to 60 years of age, to participate in the study that aims to test the effectiveness of Escitalopram as a mood stabiliser.

Escitalopram has been widely used in Europe and the United States and recently has been registered for use in Australia.

“The Institute will investigate whether treatment with this new medication results in a reduction in the number and severity of both depressive episodes and the ‘highs’ associated with Bipolar II Disorder,” Professor Parker said.

He said United States and Scandinavian studies have documented a dramatic increase in Bipolar Disorder during the last decade - now in the order of 10 percent of population.

Professor Parker said that in his own out-patient and telepsychiatry clinics, some 50 percent of people referred with a depressive condition had Bipolar Disorder.

Symptoms of Bipolar II Disorder include individuals displaying exaggerated mood swings but not having severe or psychotic states as can occur in Bipolar I Disorder. Both males and females are equally affected but it now appears more common in people in their 20’s.

If you think you may have Bipolar II Disorder, live in Sydney, are aged between 18 and 60, have never previously received an antidepressant or a mood stabiliser and would be prepared to take part in a research trial of a new drug, please contact the Black Dog Institute, where a clinician will clarify the diagnosis and researchers will provide you with further details about the study.

Please 'phone: 9382 8203, or Email: bipolar@unsw.edu.au with your name, contact number, and your preferred time to be contacted. Or see www.blackdoginstitute.org.au for more information.

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