



News Release

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SPORTING LEGENDS TO HELP OVERCOME POOR DETECTION OF BIPOLAR DISORDER

Two sporting legends, swimmer John Konrads and Rugby International, Enrique “Topo” Rodriguez, have launched a campaign “We Can Do Better” in an effort to cut the long time it takes to diagnose Australians with the depression condition known as Bipolar Disorder.

Both sportsmen have been diagnosed with Bipolar II, which is the less severe form of Bipolar Disorder, which is estimated to affect several hundred thousand adult Australians.

Health authorities believe Bipolar Disorder is a condition that, if left untreated, has a higher death rate than most types of heart disease and some forms of cancer.

According to Professor Gordon Parker, Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute, it currently takes an average of nearly two decades between onset and diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder in Australia.

Professor Parker said that in his own outpatient and telepsychiatry clinics, some 50 per cent of people referred with a depressive condition had Bipolar Disorder, but that most individuals – despite seeing health professionals previously – had not had appropriate screening questions asked.

(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.)

“Unfortunately, we are looking at a situation of high prevalence and poor detection,” said Konrads and Rodriguez.

Both sportsmen are strong supporters of the Black Dog Institute that operates under a charter to advance the understanding, diagnosis and management of mood disorders.

John Konrads, who at age 15 broke all freestyle swimming records from 200 metres to 1500 metres, urged members of the public and health professionals to look at the comprehensive Bipolar Disorder information available on the Black Dog Institute website www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

“It includes an 18 question Self-Assessment Test that takes less than five minutes to complete. The test gives people an indication if they could be suffering from Bipolar Disorder and if they may need to seek clinical assessment,” according to John.

Based on responses to 18 questions, a score of 15 or more suggests the possibility of Bipolar Disorder and the need for close clinical screening. The self-report questionnaire has proved accurate to the point that only 10 percent of people with true Bipolar Disorder return a score of less than 12.

“Topo” Rodriguez has been described as arguably the best front rower to have ever played Rugby Union for Australia. He retired after playing 15 Tests for Argentina, 26 for Australia and one for Tahiti.

He said he had felt encouraged to discuss his experience of the condition after reading an account of the life of John Konrads earlier this year who revealed for the first time he had been diagnosed with Bipolar II.

Today is the first occasion that he has spoken publicly about his own battle with Bipolar II – something he believes he has suffered from for many years. Topo said he was keen now to ensure people were better informed about the issue.

He said the Black Dog Institute website made it easy to understand all about the different types of Bipolar Disorder, the causes and the treatments available. For clinicians, there is a special comprehensive section on the Management of Bipolar Disorder.

“Hopefully, John and I can succeed as we have in the past with this new endeavour in trying to help people obtain professional help. With early and ongoing treatment, people with Bipolar Disorder can lead relatively normal lives,” Topo said.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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