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**PROPERLY TREATED, DEPRESSION'S DEFEATED
MOOD DISORDERS: TO ADVANCE WE MUST UNDERSTAND**

Twenty years of research and clinical experience has gone into establishing a practical user-friendly website (www.blackdoginstitute.org.au) on depression and mood disorders for consumers and health professionals.

Described as a “living and breathing” website, it has been launched this week by the Sydney-based Black Dog Institute.

Under the Executive Directorship of Professor Gordon Parker, the Institute is a leader in research, treatment, education and diagnosis of mood disorders – with a reputation that has earned it high acclaim, both in Australia and overseas.

In welcoming users to the new website, Professor Parker said the Institute was dedicated to advancing the understanding of mood disorders in order to improve the lives of those affected, and, in turn, the lives of their families and friends.

“We have many years of research experience and clinical experience in these fields (previously as the Mood Disorders Unit and more recently as the Black Dog Institute), and it is our aim to share this expertise with you on site,” Professor Parker said.

Professor Parker said reference to it being a “living and breathing” website meant that it would be refined and developed constantly.

“We want it to be known as a ‘trusted’ website containing reliable expert information provided in a way that is really helpful and not in overly academic language,” he said.

Chairman of the Black Dog Institute, Mr Peter Joseph, said potential users of the website would include members of the public, clinicians, researchers, the media, donors and different streams of Government.

“The website has been developed firstly with an eye on the needs of the public and while there is extensive information already available it will be developed further over time to cater for the fullest needs of others, such as clinicians, researchers, and other professionals,” Mr Joseph said.

The Website, he said, represents the achievement of a strategic milestone for the Black Dog Institute to improve the way in which it communicates and provides information about depression and mood disorders.

Already, the new website has been given the thumbs-up from a wide variety of potential users after they were given a preview in recent weeks.

Amongst these has been Professor David Castle from the Mental Health Research Institute and the University of Melbourne. "This is a useful website for people with depression or bipolar disorder, and their families. It is clearly laid out, easy to negotiate and provides useful and up-to-date information about these common and often inadequately treated mental illnesses," he said.

Jessica Rowe, the television newsreader, makes the point that one in five Australians will suffer some type of mental illness in their lives and they deserve better detection and better management.

"I'd like to add my voice to the message that mental health is the responsibility of all of us, and the sooner depression and bipolar disorder are treated just like any other illness, the better," Jessica said.

"To speak out and seek treatment for such an illness requires courage, but it is immensely liberating and you will find that you are not alone. This website will be of great assistance."

From regional NSW, Wagga Wagga based psychiatrist, Dr Gregory Weppner, said the Black Dog Institute website looks impressive and works quickly.

"I am sure it will help patients in rural areas to seek the assistance they require," Dr Weppner said.

Importantly, the website contains information on how people can obtain help and suggestions about ways of staying well (eg, fact sheets and check lists about exercise, diet, support groups, reading, meditation as well as stress management and relaxation).

Helpful links to other sites are provided as sometimes searching for information on the internet can be difficult and time-consuming. The Institute has attempted to take away some of the hard work by providing links to organisations and websites they believe provide good quality and useful information on depression and mood disorders.

A self assessment tool, while not intending to be a substitute for professional clinical advice, is available on the website. It is a quick assessment comprising 10 questions and participants are asked to rate how they have been feeling lately (the last two or three days) compared to how they would usually or normally feel.

Another section looks at when people should seek help for depression. Recognising that everybody feels down or sad at times the Black Dog Institute advises it is important to know when depression has become more than a temporary thing, and when to seek help.

Just what professional to consult is often another question. A section on the site deals specifically with mental health professionals who can provide help for depression and bipolar disorder, what they each do, how to locate a professional, and what you should expect from professional help.

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