



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Taking Control of Bipolar Disorder, Staying Well, Learning More A world first online study by UNSW and the Black Dog Institute**

A final call has gone out for volunteers who suffer Bipolar Disorder to participate in a free world-first study in which the internet is used to supplement traditional health care.

Australian researchers, who launched the study two months ago, have already received hundreds of inquiries from people wanting to enroll in the study. The cutoff point for new enrolments is the end of September this year.

“Participants are able to enroll in a program which under normal circumstances would have a fee attached,” according to Dr Caryl Barnes, Consultant Psychiatrist with the Black Dog Institute and Chief Investigator for the study.

Increasing numbers of people are currently accessing the internet to find out more about medical conditions and treatments. Researchers want to look at the next step – involving patients online in their ongoing care.

“The concept has wide implications for the management of mental health in the Australian and international populations. Potentially, this type of online help can supplement traditional health care which is already stretched to meet community needs,” said Dr Barnes.

Researchers at the Black Dog Institute and the School of Psychiatry at the University of NSW, in partnership with Perth-based health care provider, Sentiens, are recruiting people with Bipolar Disorder to participate in the innovative online study. Participants of the study will use the secure Sentiens web-based platform to access targeted online materials and track their mental health.

To be eligible for the 12-month study, people with Bipolar Disorder need to be:

- Currently seeing a medical professional for treatment of their Bipolar Disorder
- On medication
- When enrolling on the study they should be either well or experiencing only mild symptoms of depression or hypomania ( people with more serious symptoms will be eligible to be reconsidered once their condition has improved)
- 18 years of age and older
- Have access to the internet, a printer and a valid email address.

Dr Barnes said the study was originally intended to be confined to Australia. Since the program was launched, there has been significant overseas interest. While 69 percent of current enrolments are

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from Australia/New Zealand, there has been widespread interest from North America, South America, Europe and Asia.

**People interested in participating in the trial should go online via the Black Dog Institute website ([blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://blackdoginstitute.org.au)) or [Sentiens.com](http://Sentiens.com) and click on the link which explains the trial and allows them to complete the eligibility questionnaire.**

“The purpose of the study is to determine if programs designed for, and delivered over the internet, can help people with Bipolar Disorder stay well,” Dr Barnes said.

“Hopefully, such programs will help reduce symptoms and rates of relapse and admissions into hospital and assist people to remain on medication. Interestingly, one finding so far is that the majority of participants are women, (62 percent). Although this probably represents what we already know, that is, that women are more proactive than men when it comes to looking after their own health, it may also reflect a high level of acceptance and confidence that women have in using web-based programs for this purpose.

Dr Barnes said there had already been positive feedback from participants in the trial. For example:

*“... information from the program has already meant that my husband and I were able, for the very first time, to recognise the early warning signs of mania and were able to take steps which prevented it from becoming a full-blown episode.”*

*And*

*“Everyone talks about the risk of being depressed but no one talks about the risks of mania, thank you so much for including tips on ‘Staying Well’.”*

Professor Phil Mitchell, Head of the School of Psychiatry at the University of NSW, said a high percentage of people with Bipolar Disorder failed to follow their prescribed treatment. “We are hoping that this web-based program will help patients understand their condition better, and aid them in becoming more involved in their treatment program.”

“The program will allow participants to monitor their bipolar illness using state-of-the-art technology in what we believe is a world first in this type of research,” Professor Mitchell said.

Participants will have access to a large body of information which combines psycho education with specific therapeutic techniques. These are based on cognitive’ behavioral and social rhythms therapy, which are designed to help people better manage their Bipolar Disorder and keep well.

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