

MEDIA RELEASE

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Black Dog Institute Researcher Recognised

Dr Judy Proudfoot from the Black Dog Institute has been presented with a plaque from the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund (ARHRF) in recognition of her innovative work with Bipolar Disorder.

It has been a week of honours for Dr Proudfoot, the Computerised Cognitive Based Therapy program she developed with colleagues at the Institute of Psychiatry in the UK was included on Britain's top list of health innovations from the last ten years.

Australian Rotary Health has awarded Dr Proudfoot and her team of researchers at the Black Dog Institute a \$60,000 grant to enable people diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder to manage their illness with help from the web.

"People with Bipolar Disorder often report feeling 'sentenced' by their condition and stigmatised," says Dr Proudfoot. "This can result in them ceasing their medication which then exacerbates their problems."

Formerly called manic depression, Bipolar Disorder is a biological condition characterised by extreme changes in mood: 'highs' followed by long periods of depression. People with Bipolar Disorder have higher rates of drug and alcohol dependency, anxiety disorders and unemployment and are at greater risk of suicide. The economic cost of Bipolar Disorder in Australia is estimated to be \$833 million per year.

"Education, training and support assists people with Bipolar Disorder to self-manage their condition, but the challenge," Dr Proudfoot says, "is providing it in a convenient, private and non-stigmatising manner. The internet offers a cost-effective and accessible way of meeting this need."

The education program aims to help individuals and their families to better understand the condition, recognise early warning signs and reduce triggers that precede episodes, develop self-management skills, and enhance treatment adherence.

Michelle Banfield, a PhD scholar with Bipolar Disorder, says that learning to recognise the early warning signs of manic and depressive episodes and having strong support from family, friends and colleagues has been invaluable in managing the condition. "Having Bipolar Disorder has taught me a lot about managing challenges, learning to work it into my life and develop coping mechanisms. I quit my PhD the first time round due to bipolar, but now working full-time in a supportive environment has become part of my self-management. It takes a lot of work but it's do-able," says Banfield.

The program will be evaluated in a randomised controlled trial.

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 or contact onlineprograms@unsw.edu.au

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Photo available: Photos from the presentation are available via email at your request.

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