

21 September, 2018

NSW specialists meet on fresh approach to eating disorders

More than 45 of the state's leading medical specialists will come together for the first time in Sydney next week to look at new ways to treat eating disorders, which affect more than 1 million Australians.

Psychiatrists and physicians in child and adult medicine from all 15 local health districts across NSW will meet on Monday at the InsideOut Institute in Camperdown.

The institute is Australia's first centre for research and clinical excellence in eating disorders and was launched earlier this year by the Federal Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, and NSW Minister for Mental Health, Tanya Davies.

The groundbreaking meeting will be led by Professor Ian Caterson, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital endocrinologist and Director of the Boden Institute of Obesity, Nutrition, Exercise and Eating Disorders, together with Dr Nick O'Connor, psychiatrist and Clinical Director of North Shore Ryde Mental Health Service.

"Eating disorders originate in the mind and manifest in the body, yet, historically, physicians and psychiatrists have worked somewhat independently with these patients, resulting in fragmented care," Professor Caterson said.

"NSW is leading the way in ensuring treatment is much more integrated which will improve outcomes for an illness with an unacceptably high risk of mortality."

Dr O'Connor agreed, saying collaboration was paramount in delivering the best outcomes for people with eating disorders.

"At this meeting, psychiatrists and physicians will explore how we, and our services, can work better together," he said.

"A key challenge is the severity of the physical condition of people with eating disorders combined with the severity of their mental health concerns. They require a highly collaborative response from medical health and mental health."

The institute's deputy director, Danielle Maloney, said the new approach would ensure people with eating disorders had better access to high-quality integrated care in NSW hospitals.

Jenni Gilholme, 62, from the Central Coast, lived with bulimia nervosa for more than 50 years, but did not access treatment until recently.

“I’ve seen several psychologists and psychiatrists over the years, but I was always diagnosed with depression – no-one ever addressed the eating disorder,” she said.

“In 2016, at age 60, I was able to attend an eating disorders recovery day group program two to three days per week. It was the first time looking at the emotions behind the eating disorder behaviour, as well as learning skills to change.

“It helped me learn acceptance of who - and how - I was. I also learnt so much about why the eating disorder started and skills to deal with buried emotions and food – and for the first time, I can now go out for coffee with people.”

For more about Jenni, watch this video:

<https://insideoutinstitute.org.au/resource-library/jenni-s-journey-with-bulimia-nervosa>

For more information, please contact Kate Benson, Sydney Local Health District, on 0427 029 291.

Key facts about eating disorders

- There are four main types of eating disorders – anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder and other specified feeding or eating disorders (OSFED).
- Eating disorders have multiple causes, including genetics, developmental challenges (including puberty or loss), thinking styles (such as perfectionism), body dissatisfaction (body image has ranked among the top three concerns for young people over the past nine years), and socio-cultural purposes.
- One in 20 Australians is living with an eating disorder.
- Eating disorders not only affect girls and young women. Eating disorders can affect anyone, from any gender, or cultural background. Eating disorders among men are significantly under-diagnosed.
- Eating disorders can commence at almost any age, but most commonly in adolescence.
- Medical complications of eating disorders include cognitive impairment, heart complications, growth retardation and osteoporosis.
- The isolating and tormenting nature of eating disorders can lead to depression, anxiety and suicide; eating disorders have one of the highest mortality rates of all mental illnesses.