



## Understanding Depression

Ms Cheryl Wile &  
Dr Kym Jenkins

Depression is an illness that can be characterised by extreme feelings of sadness and worthlessness. Whilst symptoms of depression can vary, they may include irritability, difficulty concentrating, tearfulness, stress, fatigue, loss of interest and pleasure in usual activities, and changes to appetite and/or sleeping patterns. People suffering from depression may also experience an increase in morbid thoughts such as death or suicide.

Depression can be caused by numerous factors including current personal difficulties and/or other difficulties and/or other longer term risk factors.

It is estimated that approximately 20 per cent of people will experience depression at some point in their lives, with around 6 per cent experiencing a very severe form of the illness.

It is so important that people suffering from this illness or who feel that they may be at risk talk to someone and obtain the appropriate care, support and assistance. The VDHP has assisted many doctors and medical students suffering from this illness, and would be happy to discuss any concerns you may have.



### Case Study

Rachel was a thirty four year old General Practitioner who referred herself to the VDHP due to experiencing severe depression. On presentation she reported decreased enjoyment of usual activities, reduced appetite, frequent crying, and suicidal thoughts. She also reported increased withdrawal from family and friends, and spending increasingly more time sleeping.

Rachel said that whilst she had experienced two prior episodes of depression, they had not been as severe. She did not have a regular GP and had not discussed her current illness with any treatment providers.



After listening to Rachel's story and conducting a suicide risk assessment, the VDHP arranged for her to see both a GP and a psychiatrist. Rachel agreed to participate in the VDHP Case Management, After-care and Monitoring Program (CAMP), and was closely supported by both the VDHP and the other specialists involved in her treatment.

Following a few weeks of sick leave, Rachel then resumed part time work and built back up to full time practice. She is progressing well and is also re-establishing a social life.

## VDHP welcomes Dr Sandy Youren & Dr Amanda Young



Dr Youren joins VDHP as one of our Senior Clinicians. Her background is in psychiatry, particularly with children, adolescents and families, and psychotherapy. She has broad experience working in both public mental health and in private practice. Sandy enjoys supporting doctors in their training and professional development, and finds that working at VDHP is a natural progression of this. Sandy's expertise make her a valuable addition to our team.



Dr Young has a background in anaesthesia and is coming back from maternity leave to join the team at VDHP as a Senior Clinician. Amanda has had a long-term interest in doctors' health and medical education. She has a keen interest and passion for trainee and medical student welfare. Following the loss of a colleague to suicide she undertook research into workplace stressors for trainees and explored ways to improve trainee support. Amanda's expertise will be of great value to VDHP.

VDHP was set up to help address the health needs not only of doctors but also those of future doctors.

In doing this, VDHP has both clinical and educational roles. On the clinical side: 41 medical students came to VDHP for help in 2009; this represented 36% of the 113 new face-to-face clinical assessments that year. In addition, many students returned for follow-up and further advice. Of the medical students new to VDHP, 24% referred themselves and 63% were referred or strongly advised to come by their respective universities; the remainder were referred by a friend or family member.

Though it seems a lot of students are referred by their universities, it is actually very encouraging as the university staff are recognizing that a student who appears to be struggling perhaps with falling grades and poor attendance may not be just a weak student, but may have health problems that can be addressed.

VDHP is able to help untangle what is going on for the student in a confidential way that is detached from their studies. However, when needed and with the student's consent, VDHP works with the



appropriate university staff to increase their understanding of what the students needs and difficulties are. Interventions for students may range from simply being an independent "listening ear", through basic advice and counselling, referral to a psychologist for ongoing psychotherapy, or in some cases help in finding an appropriate psychiatrist or other specialist. We also always like to make sure the student has an independent GP.

It's reassuring that the vast majority of medical students we see at VDHP come in the early stages of any problems. We strongly advocate for this proactive approach so that with effective interventions and treatment plans students can have an easier passage through medical

school, complete their studies and have a greater chance of graduating feeling happy and confident about their medical futures.

In VDHP's educational role, of the 31 educational presentations we gave in 2009, 11 were for medical students. Presentations varied from formal university lectures to discussion groups and workshops. Topics addressed ranged from awareness of Doctors Health, dealing with stress, Doctors as patients, looking after other doctors, to just presenting information about VDHP.

So, if you know of a student who's not "travelling too well" at present, or you are a medical student and have concerns about your own health, **you can call us on 9495 6011 or email us at [vdhp@vdhp.org.au](mailto:vdhp@vdhp.org.au).**



*Dr Kym Jenkins*  
VDHP  
Medical Director

## VDHP's Rural Outreach Program



In November 2009 VDHP launched its 'Rural Outreach Program' in an endeavor to make the service more accessible to rural doctors.

If you are a rural practitioner experiencing problems with stress, burnout, substance use and/or mental health issues and would like to speak with someone, arrangements can be made for a VDHP clinician to come and talk to you at a location convenient for you.

**Appointments can be made by contacting the VDHP via telephone or e-mail.**

**A clinician will then contact you to arrange a time.**

**Phone: 03 9495 6011 Email: [vdhp@vdhp.org.au](mailto:vdhp@vdhp.org.au)**



*Ms Cheryl Wile*  
Psychologist &  
Case Manager

## VDHP farewells Prof Greg Whelan AM & Dr Matthew Frei



Professor Greg Whelan took on the role of Acting CEO of VDHP in 2007. Since that time he has given invaluable assistance to the organisation by maintaining its services in 2007, inducting new staff in 2008, and continuing to lend a helping hand in 2009 and 2010 in the areas of accounting and clinical workload. His wonderful helpful nature has made him a pleasure to have had on our team over the past few years. Professor Whelan was recently awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia on Australia Day, 2010. He is a well deserved recipient and we wish him well and all the best for his future.



Dr Matthew Frei, having been a deputy to VDHP's inaugural Medical Director in 2005, formally joined VDHP in 2008 as a Senior Clinician. Dr Frei is a member of the Australasian Chapter of Addiction Medicine and holds specialist positions at both Southern and Eastern Health. His expertise in Addiction Medicine have been a great asset to VDHP over this time and we will miss his friendly and easy going nature around the office. We wish Dr Frei all the best in his future endeavours.