

Mental Health Talk Is Cheap.

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The spate of "bad news" mental illness stories in recent weeks should be ringing alarm bells.

To me, the stories paint a picture of a Health Department desperately struggling to keep up with the demands of community needs in the area of acute and support mental health services.

As someone who has experienced the depths of clinical depression, mania and psychosis personally, I can empathize with anyone in a similar situation.

There are far too many people falling through the cracks in the system and ending up in a far worse situation that may have been averted with better resourced mental health care.

There is no doubt in my mind that in the area of mental health care we have a system in crisis and it needs an urgent and on-going injection of funding and resources.

The dogs are no longer barking on the issue of mental health reform in Australia, they are literally starting to bite back and it's long overdue.

The issue has become so important that the Federal Government and State Governments must initiate and support an education program for schools to better inform the next generation and provide a much needed boost to Mental Health resources and services.

In the past two years I have travelled to many parts of Australia and spoken about my own experience with depression in the year 2000.

My main message since going public with my story has been to offer hope to others.

That so many Australian's are now on the public record demanding a positive response from the government on this issue gives you just a small indication of how many people are effected by mental illness in the community.

The sporting community was shocked by the death of Rugby League great Steve Rogers in late 2005 (whose battle with depression was revealed by his son Matt)

The country was shaken again soon after with the news that former Western Australian Premier Geoff Gallop's was battling "The Black Dog" that is depression.

Gallop resigned as Premier citing the need to treat his depression (the most common type of mental illness)

In the not so distant past it would have been unheard of for anyone, let alone a public figure to admit to suffering with depression.

It's almost the case of our political leaders being "unable to see the forest for the trees" as there are now a number of people from within their own ranks that have battled depressive illness at some stage. Tasmania's Nick Sherry, Democrat leader Andrew Bartlett and former NSW Opposition Leader John Brogden are three high profile cases in point.

Wellknown Australians, actor Garry McDonald, Olympian John Konrads and former Wallaby Enrique Rodrigues are all on the public record as having experienced depressive illness.

The fact that so many well-known people have experienced this debilitating illness merely underlines that it is common.

Slowly but surely as the stigma surrounding all mental health issues disintegrates more stories will emerge.

This will be a steady but very necessary process that will see real change in my view and not before time.

Make no mistake about it, we all must become better educated about issues of mental health and not take good mental health for granted.

In 5 years from now I'm sure we will all look back and say how slow we were as a community to react to the problem.

We had also better get used to dealing with mental health issues and put strategies in place to minimize the impact on individuals, families and workplaces because the statistics are already saying that by the year 2020, depression will be Australia's number one health problem. One thing I can assure you of is that the condition is far more prevalent than many are prepared to admit.

There still exists a stigma today which prevents many people accessing the help they need for what is a very treatable illness.

It is only when mental illnesses go untreated for a long period of time that successful treatment becomes more difficult..

Treatment can improve the outcomes for people with a mental illness but first the problem must be acknowledged.

In my view, we are helping to create an environment for ourselves where depressive illness can overwhelm us because life is so hectic, so adrenaline driven and there is a lack of balance in our day to day existence.

The things that have helped my recovery in the past five years have been a combination of medication ,yoga, meditation,relaxation, exercise, coupled with a good diet and a greater awareness of actually how I'm feeling everyday.

Mental Health issues are complex,there is no question about that.

However the quicker that we all acknowledge that we may well be dealing with the plague of the 21st century the better off we will all be.

The time for our political leaders to stick their collective heads in the sand on this issue has long past.

It's time for action.

Our communities deserve it.

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He was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder in September 2000.

In 2004 Random House published his story "Broken Open"

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