

# Integrated approach

*South Coast Private is helping patients improve their physical and mental wellbeing to enhance overall quality of life*

People living with mental illness suffer higher rates of physical illness, higher mortality rates and people with severe mental illness have significantly lower life expectancies. The Duty to Care<sup>1</sup> report identified that although death rates from heart disease in the population have declined this is not the case in the mentally ill population, with rates even increasing amongst women living with mental illness. Additionally, despite no higher incidence of cancer in people with a mental illness they have a 30 per cent higher case fatality.

Poorer lifestyle habits, including smoking, alcohol misuse, poor nutritional intake and physical inactivity, coupled with the metabolic effects of antipsychotic, antidepressant and mood stabilizer medications, contribute to compromised physical health and the development of many lifestyle related co-morbidities in this population. People with mental illness are frequently treated for their mental health problems, however their physical health issues are commonly neglected. South Coast Private Hospital is working to unite mental and physical health care treatments to provide holistic care for patients living with mental illness.

Metabolic syndrome, a cluster of risk factors for heart disease and diabetes that often occur together, is a common condition in people with mental illness. A Western Australian study performed by John et al.<sup>2</sup> concluded that the prevalence of metabolic syndrome in Australians with severe mental illness was close to double that of the general Australian population.

South Coast Private recognises the prevalence of metabolic syndrome amongst mental health patients and has implemented metabolic monitoring of all patients to identify and treat preventable



The gymnasium at South Coast Private is open daily for patient use

lifestyle diseases. As part of the hospital admission process, all patients undergo a screen for metabolic risk factors performed by a dual qualified dietitian and exercise physiologist. Patients are then offered individual dietary and exercise assessments to develop strategies to improve their lifestyle and consequently, their physical and mental health.

In addition, patients are encouraged to engage in regular physical activity, which has multiple physical and psychological benefits, including improved mood, sleep, reduced stress, anxiety, depression, increased confidence and wellbeing. South Coast Private offers supervised use of a gymnasium by an accredited exercise physiologist, yoga sessions and social walking groups.

Healthy eating is beneficial for both physical and mental health. Patients are provided with nutritious meals, cooked fresh on site. Education sessions about nutrition and local supermarket tours are



Healthy, balanced meals are prepared fresh for patients at South Coast Private

offered regularly to empower patients with knowledge and skills to continue with healthy lifestyles post discharge.

It is our goal to ensure that the alarmingly poor physical health of people living with mental illness does not go undetected and treated. Through taking an integrated approach to health we are striving to simultaneously improve the physical and mental health to enhance the overall wellbeing and quality of life of our patients. [PH](#)

<sup>1</sup>Coghlan R, Lawrence D, Holma CDJ, Jablensky AV, 2001, *Duty to Care: Physical Illness in People with Mental Illness*, Perth: The University of Western Australia

<sup>2</sup>John AP, Koloth R, Dragovik M, Lim SBC, 2009, Prevalence of Metabolic Syndrome among Australians with severe mental illness, *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol. 190, no. 4, pp. 176-179