



ISSUED: Saturday, 15 October 2016

Talking about PTSD encourages Aussies to seek help

Dr Andrew Khoo wants everyone from princes, to performers to plumbers talking about mental health and not just during mental health week, he says.

“It’s eminently helpful that celebrities talk about it, but it doesn’t matter who talks about it, so long as they are talking about it. It’s the only way we are going to get Australians feeling comfortable about seeking help,” Dr Khoo said.

The Director of Medical Services at Toowong Private Hospital, Dr Khoo is an expert in treating post-traumatic stress disorder, an illness he is seeing more commonly now than when he began to focus on treating PTSD just over a decade ago.

“There are more cases because of recognition, and hopefully more cases because people are starting to self-identify. There is greater understanding about mental health and greater acceptance in the community, but stigma in the military domain is entrenched and in those environments and situations the stigma is magnified. It’s considered a weakness where weakness is not accepted. We have some way to go to improve that situation for military, police and emergency services.”

Dr Khoo said Australians still struggle to think of mental illness in the same way as other illnesses.

“We still don’t recognise that with medication and counselling Australians with mental illness can manage their illnesses and live perfectly normal lives. But without improved awareness and people being comfortable to discuss it, too many people are afraid or misinformed and don’t seek help.”

He said severity will impact the recovery of men and women with PTSD, some will always need help to manage their illness, while others can expect a full recovery. However, without knowing they can or how they can access help many will continue to suffer in silence.

Dr Khoo remains dedicated to working with his patients, using the very skills the services taught them to aid their recovery.

“I love working with these guys. These fellas have done a great job and service for us all. They are fit and motivated to work in teams and are goal oriented individuals and we can use all of that to help them get back to the mental health they had previously.

“As mental health week comes to an end, and just a month out from Remembrance Day I hope all Australians will be moved to consider more complex mental health conditions to continue the work to break down stigma for veterans around mental health,” Dr Khoo said.

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Information: More than 60 private hospitals around Australia provide specialised mental health services