

Funding To Create Unique Drug And Alcohol Treatment For Young People With Mental Illness

Research into clinical treatments to reduce drug and alcohol use in young people with mental illness has received a significant funding boost, with a \$1.25 million grant over three years from Gandel Philanthropy.

The funding will support Dr Gillinder Bedi from Orygen, the National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, in developing integrated and prevention-oriented drug and alcohol and mental health services for young people aged 12-25.

Dr Bedi, head of substance use research, said young people with mental illness were at increased risk of developing serious substance use problems. “We know that 48% of young people with a mental disorder also have a substance use disorder. One in four young people report that they use drugs to manage their mental illness (known as self-medication),” she said.

“Although research shows that treatment before age 24 produces better outcomes, young people often don’t seek help for drug problems: drugs may be seen as the solution for distress and mental illness, not the problem.”

Dr Bedi said existing service models seldom engage young

people in the early stages of substance abuse, when the potential for recovery is highest. "Without early intervention, substance use disorders can become chronic and lifelong conditions," she said. "People with substance use disorders wait on average 15 years from their first drug/alcohol use to receiving treatment, and 27 years until their first year without drugs."

Dr Bedi said that, historically, mental health and drug and alcohol services have been separate. "They are operated by different organisations, are frequently not located at the same facility and, even if they are co-located, require young patients to see two providers. This places the onus on the young person to seek separate help for their mental health and substance use issues. This is particularly problematic as young people may not seek help for substance abuse because it doesn't cause serious problems for them until further down the track."

In response, Orygen will use the funds from Gandel Philanthropy to establish a best-practice treatment focused on early intervention that could be leveraged within Australia, Israel, and internationally.

"This treatment approach will allow young people to get the treatment they need for both their mental health and substance abuse problems within a single seamless service," Dr Bedi said.

It will be trialled by Orygen through headspace Werribee.

Vedran Drakulic OAM, the CEO of Gandel Philanthropy, said:

“Gandel Philanthropy is proud to be supporting this new and integrated approach to address two of the most challenging issues young people may be facing. To try and support them early on to tackle both their mental health problems and their substance abuse could provide lifelong positive benefits for young people. For the trustees of Gandel Philanthropy this was clearly an initiative that warranted significant support and investment, and they very much look forward to hearing how it develops.”

(Source: Bioengineer.org)