

Media Statement

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Psychological first aid

RPH Clinical Psychologist Dr Allyson Browne understands that once the physical wounds associated with a major trauma have healed the mental scars can remain for years.

Dr Browne, who works in the State Major Trauma Unit based at RPH, said that post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression have been found to occur up to 10 times more often in Australian trauma survivors within 12 months of injury compared to community samples.

“RPH admits over 5000 traumatically injured patients a year and it is my role to conduct early assessment of trauma survivors and provide psychological treatment for a range of issues such as traumatic stress, depression, grief, adjustment, and pain management as required,” Dr Browne said.

“Consistent evidence has demonstrated that early psychological intervention for post traumatic stress symptoms arising following traumatic injury is effective in reducing symptom severity and disability.”

Dr Browne broadened her knowledge and experience last year after travelling overseas on a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship.

She visited the US, Northern Ireland, UK and South Africa to investigate models of acute mental health care for severely injured trauma survivors.

Dr Browne said the Churchill Fellowship enabled her to foster relationships with trauma experts around the world and leaders in traumatic stress and rehabilitation.

“The fellowship increased my knowledge of the cultural, social, economic, and political factors that facilitate evidence based mental health care service provision in medical settings,” she said.

Based on her discussions with trauma experts during the course of her fellowship, Dr Browne identified key areas of improvement for WA trauma services.

Continued study of the mental, physical, social, and economic impacts on trauma survivors was required, she said

“Greater integration of acute surgical care, rehabilitation, and community based health services is required for traumatic injury survivors in WA as well web based, telemedicine approaches to mental health in rural and remote populations,” she said.

In line with the national and international guidelines for managing psychological responses to trauma, Dr Browne said that “psychological first aid” is appropriate in trauma settings.

Dr Browne said she acknowledges the hundreds of Western Australian survivors of traumatic injury who have shared part of their journey with her and whose overwhelming experiences compel her to seek advances in the quality and accessibility of mental health care services following traumatic injury in Australia.

Dr Browne encouraged other WA health practitioners to seek out opportunities to advance their field by applying for a Churchill fellowship.

A Churchill Fellowship is the award of an opportunity through the provision of financial support, to enable Australian citizens from all walks of life to travel overseas to undertake an analysis, study or investigation of a project or an issue that cannot be readily undertaken in Australia.

For further details regarding the Winston Churchill Memorial Fellowship Trust please visit www.churchilltrust.com.au.

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*** Photo of Dr Browne available upon request**