

MEDIA RELEASE

24 March 2009

059/2009

Telstra Foundation funds program to help doctors manage youth mental health

A program that uses mobile phones to track the mental health of young people suffering depression will be evaluated through funding from the Telstra Foundation to see if it is suitable to treat youth depression nationwide.

Following the successful world-first pilot of *mobiletype* developed by the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute (MCRI), the Telstra Foundation has committed a Social Innovation Grant worth \$285,000 over two years as part of its ongoing community investment commitment.

The *mobiletype* pilot assisted doctors to help treat 14 to 24-year-olds with mental health concerns through the use of mobile phones. The program monitored each young person's mood, stress levels, coping strategies, alcohol and cannabis use, exercise, eating patterns and general lifestyle factors.

Participants answered the *mobiletype* program questions on a programmed mobile asking them about how they were feeling. The responses were sent to a website interface which evaluated and assessed each patient's mental well-being and produced an individual report for the doctor to help them determine what treatment was required.

The Telstra Foundation funding will enable the Murdoch Institute's Centre for Adolescent Health to conduct a Victoria-wide randomised control trial of *mobiletype* involving 200 participants. It is hoped that the trial will result in empirical data that supports the medical benefits of *mobiletype* and will lead to a national roll-out of the program.

Doctors involved in the pilot program said that the feedback report assisted them to gain a better insight into the mental well-being of more than 90 per cent of their patients and that 81 per cent of their patients had a better understanding of their own mental well-being after receiving their doctor's feedback.¹

Telstra Foundation Chairman, Herb Elliott AC, MBE, said mobile technology had a crucial role to play in facilitating the work of the institute, led by Research Fellow Dr Sophie Reid .

"The work that Dr Sophie Reid and her team are doing at MCRI pushes the boundaries in mental health treatment. *mobiletype* will use technology to help unravel some of the confusion around youth depression and help doctors get the information they need to treat their patients in the best way possible," he said.

More -

¹ Reid, S.C., Kauer, S.D., Sancu, L.A. & Patton, G.C., 2008, Delivering mental healthcare via mobile phones: A clinical trial of the *mobiletype* program and website interface for detection and management of adolescent mental health. *Australasian Society for Psychiatric Research conference*: Newcastle, Australia.

Dr Reid said that one challenge in detecting youth depression is the difficulty some young patients have in communicating their mental health issues to their GPs.

“*mobiletype* capitalises on the familiarity young people have communicating via SMS to help them express their feelings and have their mental well-being effectively assessed,” said Dr Reid.

“The Telstra Foundation has been behind this project from its inception and we’re very happy to see an ongoing commitment to developing innovative ways to treat youth depression using communications technologies. Telstra Corporation has also assisted us, providing mobiles for the trials and helping with the technology to capture and translate the information.”

“Up to 30 per cent of young people will experience a form of depression by the end of their teenage years.² About 50 per cent of common mental disorders begin during adolescence³ yet unfortunately most people wait six to 23 years⁴ to obtain appropriate treatment. Delays between the onset of depression and receiving appropriate treatment are associated with poor mental health outcomes in the long-term, which makes adolescence an important time for intervention⁵,” said Dr Reid.

- Ends -

About Murdoch Childrens Research Institute

The Murdoch Childrens Research Institute is Australia’s largest child health research centre. With 1,100 researchers, the Institute offers bench to bedside research encompassing laboratory, clinical and public health research, translating results into tangible benefits for children. This Institute is currently focussed on addressing the big issues in child health including cancer, obesity, allergies, depression, genetic conditions, early brain development and premature birth. This independent, non profit organisation, relies on support from government, corporate and private donors.

Further information about the program is available at www.mcri.com.au

About the Telstra Foundation

The Telstra Foundation is a program devoted to making a positive and lasting difference to the lives of Australian children and young people.. Since 2002, the Telstra Foundation has provided over \$28 million through more than 4,850 projects to help make a positive and lasting difference to the lives of children and young people. www.telstrafoundation.com

² Patton, G., Posterino, M., Carlin, J. B., & Bowes, G. (2003). Life events and early onset depression: cause or consequence? *Psychological Medicine*, 2003(33)

³ Kessler, R. C., Berglund, P., Demler, O., Jin, R., Merikangas, K. R., & Walters, E. E. (2005). Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the national comorbidity survey replication. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*, 62, 593-602.

⁴ Wang, P. S., Berglund, P., Olfson, M., Pincus, H. A., Wells, K. B., & Kessler, R. C. (2005). Failure and delay in initial treatment contact after first onset of mental disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*, 62, 603-613.

⁵ Wang, Berglund, Olfson, Pincus, Wells, & Kessler, 2005 (as above)

**Making a positive and lasting difference to the lives of
Australian children and young people**
www.telstrafoundation.com