



## **MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID**

**[www.mhfa.com.au](http://www.mhfa.com.au)**

### **An Award Winning Mental Health Literacy Program**

## **INSTRUCTOR NEWSLETTER**

**December 2003**

Greetings MHFA Instructors.  
I wish you all a safe and enjoyable holiday.

The year 2003 has been a very productive year with now **80** accredited MHFA Instructors facilitating widespread dissemination of the MHFA course. About **2,000** people attended a MHFA course during this year alone. **So a very hearty CONGRATULATIONS to all MHFA Instructors – WELL DONE!**

During 2003, the MHFA course spread out from the ACT through much of NSW, Victoria and Tasmania. The MHFA website lists the location of these courses: [http://www.mhfa.com.au/past\\_courses.htm](http://www.mhfa.com.au/past_courses.htm) Yes, a MHFA course has even been run the back of Bourke! There will soon be a map on the MHFA website showing all the places the MHFA program has touched.

There has been interest in the course from a number of overseas countries. The Scottish government has adopted Mental Health First Aid as part of its Suicide Prevention Strategy. Betty travelled to Scotland in 2003 to train 15 instructors, who are presently tartanising the MHFA program for rolling out across Scotland. The Finnish Department of Health is translating and adapting the Mental Health First Aid manual and Sahanaya, a mental health organisation in Sri Lanka, is translating the manual into Tamil and Sinhalese.

The Tasmanian Division of the Australian Red Cross had nine instructors trained this year and is now conducting MHFA courses on a fee-for-service basis as a complement to their regular first aid courses.

The course has received strong support from rural areas. The fertilizer company Pivot donated three truckloads of fertilizer to be auctioned to support the training of Mental Health First Aid instructors in rural areas. The aim is to have courses running in rural areas affected by drought, which is expected to have adverse effects on the mental health of these communities. The auctioning of this fertilizer raised over \$22,000 for fee-exempt scholarships. To date, 10 rural MHFA instructors have been trained using these scholarships.

Just last month, an agreement was reached with Lifeline Australia for a partnership to offer Mental Health First Aid training to members of the community in remote areas of Australia and this work is planned to start mid-2004, with training of Lifeline staff as instructors in

Queensland and Western Victoria. We are applying to the Office for Rural Health for funding.

***MHFA Award:***

In September 2003 the Mental Health First Aid Program received first prize in the Mental Health Services Achievement Awards from the Mental Health Service (TheMHS) conference of Australia and New Zealand. The home page of the MHFA website has a photo of this: <http://www.mhfa.com.au/index.htm>

***MHFA Research:***

In December 2003 a randomised controlled trial of MHFA in a workplace setting was completed with 301 public servants, who were randomised to receive training immediately or placed on a waiting list for 6 months. A formal evaluation showed that not only did the trial improve confidence in helping others, improve knowledge and reduce negative attitudes about mental health problems, it also improved the mental health of participants. Prof Tony Jorm & I are presently writing this up and will submit it to the BMC Psychiatry journal in January 2004.

A second randomised controlled trial of the MHFA Program has been carried out this year with 800 members of the public in a rural area, in collaboration with the NSW Southern Area Health Service. This trial is due for completion mid 2004. Many thanks to Karen, Tina, Jenni, Tracey & Len for their hard work in instructing all the courses for this trial.

***MHFA Future Directions:***

Work has begun to adapt the course for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse groups with funding from the National Suicide Prevention Strategy of the Commonwealth Dept Health & Ageing.

There has also been planning to develop a version of Mental Health First Aid for aboriginal communities and funding is currently being sought for this. So far, one aboriginal instructor has been trained, but he is using the regular course materials at this stage.

In 2004 I plan to develop and evaluate a version of the MHFA program to be called ADE – Anxiety and Depression Education - a program to be delivered to consumers and their families.

***Things that can happen during a MHFA course:***

**Specific Phobia Incident  
By Jane McMullen  
Hobart, TAS**

*As I sat quietly at the back of the room being a very good girl I saw something pass my foot. I thought I should take a second look and as you can most probably guess it was a bloody big huntsman spider strolling by. Well my incredible fear of spiders took over. I yelled profusely and shot out the room at a hundred miles an hour like a babbling mad woman. By this time the class was wondering what the hell was going on and I was trying to spit out the words "Spider! Spider! Get rid of it". Thankfully nobody else shared my fear and a brave young man kindly removed the spider and I eventually re-entered the room. Everyone thought it was hysterical (I am glad I can be such a great source of amusement). They were very impressed with how we incorporated such live role-plays into the course!!!!!!*

## Storm Hits MHFA Class By Thelma Maunder Parkes, NSW

*The storm hit town just after lunch as I was introducing Crisis First Aid for Suicidal Behaviour (just as well, don't you think?). We were having our class in the crypt of the Parkes Anglican Church, which was spooky enough on a normal afternoon, because it was situated underneath the main church building. As I was speaking, the power failed all over town! The storm was bringing down power lines and uprooting trees and there I was with no overheads or videos of any use. We had no loud speaker, so I suppose I was lucky to be born with a voice like a "foghorn". I had to read most of the material from the manual and I could only just make out the print. We didn't even have windows to open to get any light and the noise of the storm from above, was horrific! Now this threw me just a little, but I managed. All I could do was chalk it up to experience!*

### *MHFA Product List*

Have you visited the "secret" MHFA Instructors' webpage recently? I have put up a list and a photo of the MHFA Products available for Instructors to purchase:  
MHFA banner, polo shirt, pens, certificates, brochures and MHFA manual.

The donated print run of the MHFA manual has all been used and I now have to sell the manual to Instructors for the cost price of \$5. (You will need to increase the course fee you charge to cover this new cost). The manual is also available for sale to members of the public for \$15 from the Co-op bookshop: [www.coop-bookshop.com.au](http://www.coop-bookshop.com.au)

### *Current Research Of Interest For MHFA*

1. SSRIs effective for PMT – 20 January 2003

<http://www.cochraneconsumer.com/Content.ASP?ID=CO0000001573>

2. All forms of nicotine replacement therapy can help people quit smoking, almost doubling long term success rates – 20 January 2003

<http://www.cochraneconsumer.com/Content.ASP?ID=CO0000000595>

3. The association between depression and isotretinoin use in acne. Isotretinoin (trade names Roaccutane & Oratane), is a vitamin A derivative - January 2003.

Ng CH & Schweitzer I. (2003) [The association between depression and isotretinoin use in acne. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry; 37:78-84](#)

This article is not available free on the web but I can email it to you as a pdf.

4. Schizophrenic and depressed people find smoking more rewarding.

Spring B. *et al.* (2003) [Cigarette smoking for comparably heavy smoking Schizophrenic, depressed and non patient smokers. Am J Psychiatry, 160:316-322](#)

This article is not available free on the web but I can email it to you as a pdf.

5. Faulty Gene Found to Trigger Schizophrenia

[http://www.abc.net.au/cgi-bin/common/printfriendly.pl?/science/news/health/HealthRepublish\\_897597.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/cgi-bin/common/printfriendly.pl?/science/news/health/HealthRepublish_897597.htm)

A faulty version of a gene involved in short-term memory has been shown to trigger schizophrenia in mice, and a similar gene appears to be common among schizophrenics, researchers announced today.

#### 6. SAM-e helps mood & bone health

<http://www.latimes.com/features/health/la-he-supp27oct27,1,2747985.story?coll=la-headlines-health>

S-adenosyl-L-methionine — popularly known as SAM-e (pronounced "sammy") — occurs naturally in the human body, where it plays a role in many important biochemical pathways, including DNA synthesis. In Spain, Germany and Italy, the compound is sold as a prescription drug for treating depression, liver disease and osteoarthritis.

**Uses:** In the United States, SAM-e is sold as a dietary supplement for improving bone health and mood. It's also taken to improve liver health, mental performance and fibromyalgia — which causes muscle and joint pain and fatigue — and to alleviate some symptoms of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases.

**Dose:** 400 to 1,600 milligrams a day for depression and liver problems, or 200 to 1,200 milligrams for bone health; taken in two to three separate doses on an empty stomach.

**Precautions:** Side effects are rare and mild, but include upset stomach, headache and anxiety. The supplement also may cause mania in people with bipolar disorder. Little is known about the effects of high-dose or long-term use of SAM-e.

**Research:** A 2002 report by the Department of Health and Human Services reviewed the results from about 50 clinical trials of SAM-e and concluded that the compound is "equivalent to standard therapy for depression and osteoarthritis." Several studies also suggested that SAM-e works faster and produces fewer side effects than many other antidepressants. The report concluded that although SAM-e was superior to placebo pills for treating some aspects of liver disease, it was not necessarily better than standard available treatments. Other trials, not addressed in the report, have failed to show that SAM-e is useful in treating fibromyalgia.

#### 7. Cortisol levels as a marker for Depression

<http://pn.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/38/24/17>

#### 8. Aust & NZ Clinical Practice Guidelines for Panic Disorder & Agoraphobia

<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/links/doi/10.1111/j.1440-1614.2003.01254.x/abs/>

#### 9. Summary of Cochrane Review that Debriefing could do more harm than good.

<http://www.informedhealthonline.org/item.aspx?review=000560>

10. Great new information up on the NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health – US Govt funded) website. It is worth checking this website every so often.

What to Do When an Employee is Depressed: A Guide for Supervisors

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depemployee.cfm>

Information about coping with traumatic events:

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/outline/traumatic.cfm>

Gene More Than Doubles Risk Of Depression Following Life Stresses

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/events/prgenestress.cfm>

## **11. AIHW SUICIDE REPORT AVAILABLE ONLINE AS PDF**

The Australian suicide data given on the MHFA overheads 13 - 16 are from the report: Steenkamp M & Harrison JE (2000) Suicide and hospitalised self-harm in Australia. Injury Research and Statistics Series. Adelaide: AIHW

This report can no longer be purchased and is now only available on the web. You can download it at

<http://www.nisu.flinders.edu.au/pubs/reports/2001/suicide.php>

I strongly recommend you access and read this to give you that bit more of information about the 4 graphs you have in the set of MHFA overheads. If you cannot access this report but really want it, let me know and I will organise to get it downloaded into a hardcopy and posted to you.

### *Just a reminder again:*

Please email me the details of any MHFA courses you have planned so that I can advertise them on the MHFA website. Also, at the completion of each MHFA course you conduct, please, please let me know:

Dates,  
Town,  
Number of participants,  
Fee charged.

This is my only way of keeping tally of the wonderful job you are all doing in the dissemination of the MHFA course.

Warm regards

*Betty*

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