



Media Release

12 October 2016

Mental Health Week - Flying Doctor calls for men to “Man Up” on mental health

One of the many confronting statistics that will emerge from World Mental Health Day and Mental Health Month is that four million Australians (17.5%) reported having a mental or behavioural condition in 2014-15¹. The other is that women accessing a counsellor in the past year outnumbered men by a ratio of 2:1.²

“The sad fact that women are more likely to seek help than men is confirmed by the cohort of rural and remote residents we see at the various clinics and workshops we do and in the referrals we receive,” said Glynis Thorp, Mental Health Project Officer at the Royal Flying Doctor Service, South Eastern Section (RFDS SE).

“We had a 16 per cent increase in appointments during the second half of 2015. Of the 141 people we saw, 32 were males and 89 were females.”

“In the past six months we have seen the ratio go from 3:1 to 4:1, which is why we are using Mental Health Month to advertise our services to men who might be doing it tough.”

The RFDS SE mental health team, comprising of three clinical nurse specialists in mental health and a alcohol and other drugs counsellor, visit 16 clinic locations spanning Far West New South Wales, South Western Queensland and eastern South Australia. During 2015-16 they conducted a total of 1290 service contacts. This was up from 1249 last year and follows two years of increases of 30 and 28 per cent respectively.

“The increased numbers of clients we are helping is testament to the way the mental health team has been pro-actively promoting mental health and wellbeing, but the female to male ratio tells us that we still have a way to go to persuade men that it is alright to ask for help,” said Ms Thorp.

“We understand that life on the land is tough. Living and working in hostile climatic and environmental conditions, coping with financial pressures created by drought and changing market conditions, a lack of access to health services or outside people to talk to can all exacerbate feelings of helplessness and isolation.”

“A lack of access to mental health professionals in regional, rural and remote areas is a factor, but so is good old-fashioned “rural stoicism” and male pride that has been handed down the generations.”

To counter this, the RFDS SE is using other, less direct methods to encourage men to “man up” about mental health issues. “Pit Stop and Pearls,” a streamlined, seven-stage car-themed health check that

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National Health Survey: Mental Health and co-existing physical health conditions, Australia 2014 - 15* <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/COA4290EF1E7E7FDCA257F1E001COB84?Opendocument>

² Australian Department of Health, *Mindframe National Media Initiative* <http://www.mindframe-media.info/for-media/reporting-mental-illness/facts-and-stats>

can be done in 30 minutes, invites male visitors to make a 'pit stop' for a full health 'rego' check at local Fairs, festivals and agricultural shows.

"It caters for both sexes, but men's health is the key focus as they will book their car in for a regular service, but are reluctant to see a doctor," said Ms Thorp.

For the past two years, the RFDS SE mental health team have been bringing families off remote communities and stations for a two day/one night away workshop. The 'Performance is Personal' workshop aims to give participants the skills to improve their day-to-day life by touching on communication, resilience and how to manage as a family running a family business.

"The workshop looks at staying mentally well, managing stress and taking time out for yourself, as well as promoting social inclusion," says RFDS SE Mental Health Nurse, Vanessa Latham.

The RFDS SE team also use new media to communicate with clients. Skype, Facebook and email has helped to overcome the tyranny of distance still experienced by those on remote stations and any privacy issues people may have about coming to a clinic in person.

"Through these various approaches we hope to change attitudes about mental health, particularly amongst rural men. We also hope to build trust and longer term relationships with community members that will encourage them to reach out to us if they need help in the future," said Ms Thorp.

As part of mental health month (October) and specifically mental health week 9-15 October 2016, the RFDS SE Mental Health Team (where able) will be offering to do free "psychological distress" screening using the K10 tool for adult patients awaiting their GP appointment. Where able, Graham Archer (Drug and Alcohol worker and Oncologist) will be administering The FAST Test for alcohol and the Fagerstom Test for nicotine dependence. The screenings

Monday 10 October

Clive Bishop Medical Centre - K10 "psychological distress" screening.
Ivanhoe - Drink and smoke check

Tuesday 11 October

Tibooburra – K10 "psychological distress" screening.
Clive Bishop Medical Centre - K10 "psychological distress" screening.

Wednesday 12 October

Wilcannia – K10 "psychological distress" screening.
Menindee – Drink and smoke check

Thursday 13 October

Wiawera - K10 "psychological distress" screening.

Friday 14 October

Ivanhoe – K10 "psychological distress" screening.
Clive Bishop Medical Centre - K10 "psychological distress" screening.

- ENDS -

For more information or photographs, contact:

Nick Bleszynski, Media Consultant, RFDS (South Eastern Section) on 0403 931 291 or nick.bleszynski@rfdse.org.au

Ryan Young, Digital Marketing Communication Coordinator, RFDS (South Eastern Section) on 0427 39 247 or ryan.young@rfdse.org.au

ABOUT THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

The not-for-profit Royal Flying Doctor Service has been taking the finest care to the furthest corners of Australia since 1928. The service provides 24 hour emergency cover to 90% of the Australian continent, via a modern fleet of specially equipped aircraft. In the past year, the South Eastern Section facilitated almost 4,500 clinics, took over 5,500 telehealth calls, had over 49,100 patient contacts and transported almost 8,200 patients.

