

PRESS RELEASE – 13 NOVEMBER 2017

Mental health treatment failing two thirds

- New research finds half (50%) of people in Australia have experienced a mental health issue in their lifetime.
- Two-thirds (67%) believe their mental health treatment could be improved.
- 1 in 5 (21%) believe they are not on the right medication or dose.
- DNA testing could provide hope for those struggling with mental health issues to find more suitable treatments.

New research reveals two thirds (67%) of those taking mental health medication believe that improvements could be made to their treatment. Whilst 18% of people who waited months for their medication to take effect, felt at risk.

The national research carried out by myDNA finds that 1 in 2 (50%) have experienced a mental health issue in their lifetime, with two thirds (66%) of those opting to use medication to manage their mental health.

Associate Professor Les Sheffield, Medical Director at myDNA says, “Mental health conditions are different for each person and require the right diagnosis. Treatment offerings are varied and can include medication, which can be effective when a patient receives the right medication at the right dose.”

Surprisingly, as many as 1 in 2 (50%) people have needed to change their prescription multiple times and 1 in 5 (21%) still don't believe they are on the right drug or dose to manage their mental health effectively.

Carol Dyball suffered with chronic depression and was taking anti-depressants for more than fifteen years. She struggled to find medication that worked for her, with drugs either not working or giving her extreme side effects.

“Changing medication was a process that took several months of trial and error. I had to take so much time out of work whilst waiting for the medication to take effect and it would still leave me feeling very low, I felt like I was on a constant emotional roller-coaster.”

The answer to uncovering how an individual metabolises certain medications, lies within our DNA. Understanding our genetics can reduce the trial and error process of finding the right prescription, enabling people to gain control of their mental health more safely and potentially with fewer side effects.

Professor Sheffield advises, “There are now international guidelines about what to do with results and how they relate to the medication and dosage. International trials have also provided good evidence that DNA testing can predict the risk of side effects.”

“As some side effects have the potential to be serious, it's a good reason for people to talk with their doctor or pharmacist for a pharmacogenomic test.”

Jayashri Kulkarni, Professor of Psychiatry at The Alfred and Monash University says, “Different people do experience different side effects and it can be related to the actual type of the drug the way their body handles that drug and the dose of the drug”

Doctors and patients are now starting to turn to readily available DNA testing kits, which evaluate the most effective drug for each individual and help determine the appropriate dosage based on their genetic makeup.

A friend of Carol's suggested she take a DNA test to see if her genetics could uncover why her medication wasn't working for her.

"The test showed that the meds I had been on for more than 15 years were incompatible for me as I am unable to metabolise certain medications."

"The report also recommended suitable alternatives and after switching, it didn't take long for the medication to take effect. Since then, my whole life has turned around for the better," Carol says.

"A simple change that's based on evidence can actually improve the quality of life you know and completely turn around their life" says Kulkarni.

During National Psychology Week (12th – 18th November), Professor Sheffield is encouraging those who are struggling with their mental health to seek advice from their GP or local pharmacist to learn how they respond and process certain medications and whether a DNA test could help them improve their mental health treatment.

Please contact myDNA for more information.

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