

MEDIA RELEASE

27 NOVEMBER 2009



Saving a life by asking “RU OK?”

Tasmania’s GPs say that asking someone if he or she is OK may be a lifesaver for a person living with depression or anxiety and just reaching out could have a significant impact on that person’s wellbeing.

General Practice Tasmania (GPT) spokesperson Dr Judith Watson said while the message was simple, the impact of depression and anxiety on the community and its relationship with other health issues was often under-recognised.

A national day of action, RU OK? Day, will be held this Sunday, November 29. It aims to raise awareness of, and assist in preventing, suicide.

Dr Watson said that general practice had a vital role to play in treating and managing mental illness which could often trigger suicide.

“I would encourage people to visit their general practitioner (GP) for mental health issues, as well as their physical health. Often there is a link with physical health impacting on mental health and wellbeing and GPs are well equipped to deal with both,” Dr Watson said.

The three Divisions of General Practice across Tasmania run a number of mental health programs supporting GPs to deliver good care to people of all ages living in Tasmania.

The statewide programs include:

- The Headspace program which operates in Northern Tasmania to assist youth with physical and mental health issues in a multidisciplinary team based environment.
- The Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) program enables GPs to refer patients to psychologists easily and offers more patient support at low / no direct cost to the patient.

Dr Watson said that the Medicare Benefits Schedule Better Access Initiative also improved options for access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and GPs through access to mental health professionals and team-based mental health care. GPs continued to work closely with other mental health professionals.

The Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program (MHNIP) is another initiative that enables GPs to access the services of an eligible mental health nurse to work in collaboration to provide services such as monitoring a patient’s mental state, medication management and improving links to other health professionals.

“I encourage the Tasmanian community to take the time to ask people they care about – RU OK?” Dr Watson said.

For more information on RU OK? Day, visit the website www.ruokday.com.au

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The General Practice Tasmania network is a unique statewide infrastructure that supports contemporary general practice in Tasmania by linking GPs with each other, by supporting all members of the general practice team and, increasingly, by employing or supporting allied health professionals such as physiotherapists, dieticians and psychologists to be part of the primary care team. General Practice Tasmania is also a proud member of the Australian General Practice Network.

