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## **PRESS RELEASE**

# **New guidelines set to raise awareness and improve identification, diagnosis and treatment of bipolar disorder in children and adults**

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health have today (26 July) launched a clinical guideline on the identification, treatment and management of bipolar disorder in children and adults.

Bipolar disorder (formerly known as manic depression) is a serious mental health condition characterised by the presence of episodes of mania and depression. During a manic episode, the person usually has feelings of elation, irritability, or both. They may also feel over-confident and be driven to take unnecessary risks. When a person has depression they feel low and lose pleasure in things they used to enjoy and may also have other symptoms such as feeling tired all the time, sleep problems, poor concentration, feelings of worthlessness and/or guilt and thoughts of suicide or harming oneself.

The guideline calls for more to be done to ensure that bipolar disorder is correctly identified and recognised by health professionals and sets out the criteria for when patients need to be referred on for specialist psychiatric assessment and treatment. It also sets out the drug treatment options for people with bipolar disorder and emphasises the need to involve service users in treatment decisions. Other recommendations cover the need for annual physical health checks for people with bipolar disorder and the need for all healthcare professionals to monitor carefully the medication taken by patients.

**Andrea Sutcliffe, Deputy Chief Executive of NICE and Executive Lead for this guideline** says: "Bipolar disorder often goes unrecognised or mis-diagnosed and more needs to be done to raise awareness of the condition and the fact that there are effective treatments

available. This guideline should help raise awareness by setting out how people with bipolar disorder should be identified and treated”

**Mr Stephen Pilling, Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Joint Director of the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health who developed the guideline on behalf of NICE**

**says:** “It can take on average around 8 years from onset of first symptoms to receiving a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. This is far too long. More needs to be done to improve awareness, identification and recognition of this problem so that appropriate treatments are prescribed and symptoms can be better controlled.”

**Professor Richard Moriss, Professor of Psychiatry, University of Nottingham and**

**Guideline Development Group member says:** “Bipolar disorder is a lifelong condition that requires continuity of care. Too often patients do not have access to the medical help they require. The guideline should clarify the assessment and treatment needed and give hope to people with bipolar that with proper continuing treatment they can lead a relatively normal and fulfilled life.”

**Dr Clare Lamb, Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist, North Wales Adolescent Service, Conwy & Denbighshire NHS Trust and Guideline Development Group Member**

**says:** “Bipolar disorder is common. Studies suggest a lifetime prevalence of one in every hundred people, with many cases beginning in early adolescence. Bipolar disorder can disrupt social, educational and emotional development leading to significant disability. However, early detection and effective treatment can result in recovery and a good quality of life. This guideline provides information for young people, parents, carers and professionals on the signs to look out for to ensure early detection of bipolar disorder and on the treatments that are effective. It also makes clear the importance of mental health services working with other agencies and the need for continuity of care into adulthood.”

**Robert Westhead, patient representative on the Guideline Development Group says:**

“Bipolar disorder is an extraordinary illness. Many celebrated figures, past and present have suffered from this illness. They include Spike Milligan, Robert Schumann and Virginia Woolf – the list goes on. More recently, Frank Bruno and Stephen Fry have spoken out publicly about their struggles with the illness.

“But hundreds of thousands of ordinary people like me also battle with the illness. There is now a huge range of medications available which means that nearly everyone has a chance of finding a treatment which will work for them.

“Tragically, I suspect that many patients are probably still not getting the best possible treatment for them. I was diagnosed at 19, but it’s taken me 14 years to get the right combination of drugs.

"I fear that my experience is all too common - a terrible personal tragedy being played out in homes across the country, with people not on the right medication, leaving them living a half-life. I hope these guidelines will encourage psychiatrists to be more ambitious for their patients and encourage them to explore all available drug options."

**Michelle Rowett, Chief Executive of the MDF The BiPolar Organisation says:** "Bipolar disorder is a highly manageable condition, and with the right package of treatment (usually involving a mix between medication and self management techniques) people with the condition can lead successful and fulfilling lives. It's an unacceptable tragedy that, as a result of delays in diagnosis and the lack of consistent knowledge and understanding about the condition, people's lives can be severely damaged in the course of their journey to learn about the condition and to find the right treatment. Some people do not make it - untreated 1 in 7 people with bipolar disorder will take their own lives and bipolar disorder has the highest suicide rate of any mental illness. We cannot stress enough the importance of national clinical guidelines as a tool to raise treatment standards for the care of patients with bipolar disorder across England and Wales. These should help to improve diagnosis rates and to inform about the range of non-medical interventions like our self help group network and our self management programmes, which so many find invaluable in learning to live with this condition."

## **Notes to Editors**

### **About NICE**

1. On 1 April 2005 the National Institute for Clinical Excellence took on the functions of the Health Development Agency to form the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). NICE is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health.
2. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health:
  - **public health** – guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health for those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public and voluntary sector
  - **health technologies** – guidance on the use of new and existing medicines, treatments and procedures within the NHS
  - **clinical practice** – guidance on the appropriate treatment and care of people with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS.

### **About MDF The BiPolar Organisation**

MDF The BiPolar Organisation is a user-led charity working to enable people affected by Bipolar Disorder / manic depression to take control of their lives.