



Photo: Dr Carolyn Ehrlich

Mental health, physical health

Severe mental illness is such an obvious and overriding concern that, anecdotally, medical professionals often find it difficult to diagnose and address ongoing physical illnesses, which can quickly spiral out of control.

In order to address this issue the Griffith Health Institute's Population and Social Health program has established the activate: mind & body research project in partnership with Queensland Health, General Practice Queensland and University of Queensland.

Led by Dr Carolyn Ehrlich the project will result in the implementation of guidelines for health professionals on how to work with people with severe mental health issues.

"People with mental illnesses often find it difficult to explain their physical concerns to a health professional, as a result they have health outcomes which often match those of Aboriginal men," said Dr Ehrlich.

"The dental health of people with severe mental illness is appalling.

"There are so many boundaries to their care, the health system is not conducive to dealing with people with complex, concurrent problems. They take more time and have more questions and the professions can't agree on who is in charge of the issue."

The research component will use two intervention sites (Townsville and Brisbane south) with a multi-sector approach to practice reform. Health professionals will complete a pre and post intervention survey to ascertain skills and background with health promotion.

After linking data sets and comparing with the results from control districts, Dr Ehrlich and her team hope to be able to develop an intervention that supports the adoption of guidelines by healthcare professionals.

"The guidelines need to be locally responsive. They're not going to cut it if they just sit on the shelf like so many other guidelines," Dr Ehrlich said.

Elderberry remedy gets clinical eye

Elderberry fills the folk remedies of three continents and formed the bedrock for doctors' prescriptions since Hippocrates first acclaimed the Elder tree as his personal "medicine chest".

The berry's benefits are mainly preventative, as it contains powerful antioxidants (anthocyanins and flavonoids) and vitamins. Now a team of Griffith Health Institute researchers are putting claims that Elderberry can protect against colds and flu under the microscope.

Dr Evelin Tiralongo and Dr Shirley Wee from the Griffith Health Institute's Molecular Basis of Disease research group will soon begin a clinical trial of Elderberry lozenges in preventing upper respiratory symptoms in air travellers.

They are testing the product of a European company called BerryParma, who specialise in natural preventative remedies.

This trial will follow their 2010 research which proved standardised Echinacea tablets, taken before and during long-



Photo: Elderberry, Hippocrates medicine chest

haul air travel, reduce the incidence of respiratory symptoms for international airline passengers.

The Echinacea research was repeated by a huge study led by Cardiff University which endorsed and referenced the Griffith results.

Dr Wee said the pair's rationale for their research was to put an evidence base under folk medicines and old wives tales.

"There are some great traditional medicines that have been passed down through families or communities which

just don't have any science behind them. There's also a lot of misinformation which could be dismissed through a scientific approach," she said.

"Aeroplanes are good places to conduct cold and flu trials as air travel can be stressful and the environment basically ensures you're bound to catch something. You've hundreds of people from all over the world locked in a pressurised, dry air cabin for a long time."

It is hoped the Elderberry trial will begin at the start of 2013 and take 18 months.