DRUGS NOT A SILVER BULLET CURE FOR SCHIZOPHRENIA

Medication should not be regarded as a silver bullet in the treatment of schizophrenia, according to two of Australia’s leading mental health bodies.

However, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists and SANE Australia say medication is the cornerstone of schizophrenia treatment.

RANZCP President-elect, Dr Julian Freidin, says medication is essential for most people suffering from schizophrenia. He says research has found that poor medication adherence is among the leading causes of sufferers relapsing and having to be re-admitted to hospital.

Dr Freidin says people should not cease taking their medication or vary the dosage without first consulting their doctor or psychiatrist. Research in the United States has found that 80 percent of patients relapsed within a year if they stopped taking their medication.

Barbara Hocking, Executive Director of SANE Australia, says that while medication is important, ideally treatment should generally include a combination of medication and psychological therapy. Access to community support programs, and education and support for families is an essential component of the treatment package.

Dr Freidin says most Australians enjoy good mental health but an Australian Bureau of Statistics survey released in December 2003 found that 9.6% of the population or 1.8 million people reported having a long-term mental or behavioural problem that had lasted, or was expected to last, for six months or more.

For further comment:

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The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (www.ranzcp.org) is the principal organisation representing the medical specialty of psychiatry in Australia and New Zealand. There are currently 2600 Fellows of the College who account for approximately 85 per cent of all practicing psychiatrists in Australia and over 50 per cent of psychiatrists in New Zealand.

SANE Australia (www.sane.org) is a national charity helping people affected by mental illness. It works in partnership with a number of Australian and international groups. SANE relies completely on donations and grants to carry out its mission.