

New approach to diagnosing anorexia nervosa

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(Medical Xpress) -- A new approach for diagnosing patients with anorexia nervosa has been developed at the University of Sydney. The approach could have a significant impact on the treatment and recovery of sufferers, as well as reducing the strain on public health.

As reported in the [Sydney Morning Herald](#), Professor Stephen Touyz, of the University of Sydney's Centre for Eating and Dieting Disorders, advocates a move to diagnosing [anorexia nervosa](#) in stages of severity, similar to the method used for diagnosing cancer.

"At the moment, you can only diagnose anorexia nervosa if you have the illness quite severely already," says Professor Touyz.

"By the time you have anorexia nervosa, and people can see that you've got it, you're an extremely ill person. This is an illness where 20 percent of people who are diagnosed could potentially die."

Professor Touyz's proposed system of stages would introduce the diagnosis of stage one anorexia nervosa for patients who clearly already suffer from the illness but do not yet meet its official diagnostic criteria.

The need for early diagnosis and treatment is particularly pressing given the severe lack of hospital treatment options for adults suffering from anorexia nervosa. While adolescents with eating disorders are well covered by the public hospital system, there are very few options for adult sufferers.

"In NSW, there are almost no places for adults to get treatment without private health insurance. There are two hospital beds at RPA, and another few at Westmead that aren't specifically designated as [eating disorder](#) beds.

"But if you pick up the disease early enough, you can receive proper treatment early on, have a better chance of overcoming the illness and avoid hospitalisation," Professor Touyz says.

The staging model would also improve public awareness and understanding of anorexia nervosa, says Professor Touyz.

"People who have symptoms of anorexia nervosa but don't meet the [diagnostic criteria](#) are currently described as having EDNOS, or 'eating disorder not otherwise specified'. If you tell people you have EDNOS, few people understand. But if you say you have stage one [anorexia nervosa](#), people appreciate the seriousness of the condition."

Provided by University of Sydney

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