

**'All I remember was being a normal, happy, healthy girl, getting too obsessed with diet and exercise and then suddenly falling into this hole'**



Ineke Clark, 21, who was successfully treated for anorexia nervosa at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden. Its treatment is based on the controversial belief that the disorder has a physical, rather than psychological, basis.

PICTURE: CRAIG ABRAHAM

# Eating disorder clinic raises local experts' ire

By **MELISSA FYFE**  
HEALTH EDITOR

IT IS dismissed as "bullshit" and an expensive placebo. But Sweden's Karolinska Institute is so convinced its treatment can cure eating disorders that it has set up a clinic in Melbourne.

The institute, which does not believe that anorexia nervosa stems from a mental health problem, is at odds with most of the world's anorexia experts. Instead, its doctors believe that the disorder, which claims the life of one in five sufferers, develops as a girl diets and then gets pleasure from losing weight and exercising too much. The starvation then triggers the psychological problems such as obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression.

The doctors say that if they teach the girls how to eat again, the mental symptoms will disappear. The standard care is to treat anorexia as a

psychiatric disorder, and this usually includes antidepressants.

Desperately trying to save the lives of their daughters, 19 Australian families have paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to have them treated at the institute in Stockholm in the past few years. Their daughters were treated there at a cost of \$1000 a day as an outpatient, or \$2000 as an inpatient.

Of these Australian patients, 10 have recovered, two have not and the rest are continuing treatment. The institute has a 75 per cent success rate after 14 months with all its patients, according to the results of a small trial published in scientific literature.

As part of its treatment, a Mandometer, a disc-like weighing scale with a small computer attached to it, tells each patient how much they should eat and at what speed. After eating, the patients are put into a warm room. Doctors

## ANOREXIA NERVOSA

■ Treated as a mental illness in Australia. Lasts between five to seven years; one in five sufferers die; one in 10 sufferers are male; occurs in about 0.5 per cent of girls and young women in developed societies

## KAROLINSKA INSTITUTE EATING DISORDER CLINIC

■ Based in Stockholm, Sweden, offices in Amsterdam and America; has cured 250 sufferers; treatment cost covered by Swedish health care system but foreigners pay \$1000 a day for out-patient care, \$2000 for inpatient; 19 Australian girls (seven from Victoria) have been treated in Stockholm. Ten of these patients are in remission, two not cured and the rest continuing treatment.

say this lowers patients' anxiety. Patients receive counselling but do not take antidepressants. The institute says these suppress appetite.

The Melbourne clinic, in Brighton, will initially provide support for the Australian girls treated in Sweden. But the institute aims within three years to set up an inpatient and outpatient clinic and a research centre.

One of the treatment's pioneers, Cecilia Bergh, said

yesterday that the institute was talking to several private health insurance funds.

Dr Bergh said the institute would like Medicare support, but knew hard lobbying would be required.

Treatment for outpatient care at the clinic, over six to 12 months, will cost between \$50,000 and \$60,000.

Ineke Clark, now 21, who was treated in Sweden for seven months, said the institute saved her life. She weighed

37 kilograms when her anorexia was at its worst. "I had been told that I had depression before I got sick. That never made sense to me. All I remember was being a normal, happy, healthy girl, getting too obsessed with diet and exercise and then suddenly falling into this hole," she said.

Ms Clark, 162 centimetres tall and now weighing 52 kilograms, went off antidepressants at the clinic. "It is so incredibly important to get some sort of (public) funding," she said. "In Sweden it is just standard treatment."

Last year, a State Government inquiry recommended that the Department of Human Services and the federal Health Department look at a trial of a Karolinska-type clinic in Victoria. This week, the state department said this was a Federal Government job.

Claire Vickery, founder and chief executive officer of the Butterfly Foundation, a support

and education group, said yesterday that Karolinska was another private clinic that most people could not afford. "I think it is absolutely outrageous that there is so much fuss about this clinic. The craziest thing is that we have fantastic therapies right here in Australia, but people can't afford them."

Eating disorder expert Susan Sawyer, at the Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Adolescent Health, said yesterday that the institute's theory on the disorder was "just bullshit". Dr Sawyer said the public health system needed more money to deal with the ever-increasing demand for eating disorder treatment, from ever-younger patients.

"We want to provide a quality service to those who can afford to pay and those who can't."

Eating disorder helpline: 9885 0318, 1300 550 236