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Page 1 of 1

ANOREXIA IS NOT IN THE MIND

JACKIE SINNERTON

QUEENSLANDERS are being treated for eating disorders at an Australian clinic that claims impressive cure rates by approaching the disease as a dieting, rather than a psychological, problem.

The clinic uses the mandometer, a small computer that monitors food intake, exercise and loss of calories – a far cry from traditional protocols such as hospitalisation, forced feeding, removal of privileges or psychoactive drugs.

The mandometer was established at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden in 1993 and is available in clinics in Melbourne and New York. Queenslanders make up 30 per cent of the Australian patients.

Institute researchers found eating disorders were a direct result of calorie restriction through dieting rather than psychological problems.

The treatment is for anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, ENDOS and binge-eating disorders. The program's founder claims that of 1140 patients cured, none has relapsed within five years, and quotes a 75 per cent remission rate.

“Contrary to the poor outcomes achieved from standard treatment programs, with the right treatment and follow-up, eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia can be cured,” Dr Cecilia Bergh said.

More than one million Australians live with an eating disorder. Practice manager Iva Iaefta claims that many patients are referred to them as a “last resort”.

“Traditional treatment programs in Australia achieve an average remission rate of just 25 per cent, which can have long-term detrimental health outcomes for sufferers. Half of anorexics will improve but then relapse,” she said.

The long-term treatment can cost up to \$35,000. Some health funds partially or fully fund the treatment.

A spokeswoman for The Butterfly Foundation, which helps people with eating disorders, said there were a variety of treatments and people responded differently to them.

Queenslander Sophia Jansson, 24, started eating less at age 12. The keen gymnast hurt her back at 16 and couldn't train and was determined not to gain weight. Her weight plummeted, but through the mandometer treatment, she gained weight and relearned normal eating habits, and so her mental health improved.

“I decided to follow every single thing the clinic told me to do – eat all of my meals, talk to my case manager about my feelings, work on my eating habits. I was amazed how everything changed for the better,” she said.