

**MEDIA RELEASE: Embargoed 6am November 4, 2020**

**“It’s one of the hardest things we do as clinicians”: new online program to equip health professionals with the skills to deliver meal support to individuals with eating disorders**

InsideOut Institute for Eating Disorders - a collaboration between the University of Sydney and Sydney Local Health District - has launched a new online program to provide health professionals in the inpatient setting with the skills needed to deliver meal support in an empathetic, compassionate, and effective way.

*Meal Support in the Hospital Setting* is suitable for any clinician providing care to an individual with an eating disorder in hospital.

“Meal support is one of the most fundamental aspects of care for people with eating disorders”, according to InsideOut Institute Director and Clinical Psychologist, Dr Sarah Maguire from the University of Sydney.

“Eating is a hugely challenging task for the individual with this illness, always involving stress and anxiety. At the same time, food is the medicine for an eating disorder. Just like all other medicines in a hospital environment, this needs to be delivered reliably, consistently and with great skill,” she said.

“Having a clinician who can compassionately and supportively guide you through learning to eat healthily again can make all the difference.”

Effective meal support and supervision will prevent further deterioration of the individual’s health, and improve adherence to the treatment plan, which can result in shorter hospital admissions.

*Meal Support in the Hospital Setting* was developed by InsideOut Institute for Eating Disorders in response to requests by health professionals seeking to better provide emotional support, encouragement and reassurance to a person with an eating disorder around mealtimes, according to Jo Titterton, Clinical Nurse Consultant, The Eating Disorder Service, Sydney Children’s Hospital.

“It’s probably one of the hardest things we do as clinicians, and in particular as nurses, in our treatment of people with an eating disorder,” she said.

“But I think there’s certain things that you can actually do to help with your confidence and with your skills.”



“Probably, the most important thing is to increase your understanding of eating disorders - what they are and how they impact the person experiencing one.

“It’s also important to remember when you’re caring for someone with an eating disorder and you’re sitting down at the meal table is that yes, you’ve got other things going on in the ward and you might have other patients to care for, but meal supervision and support is pivotal - it is vital.”

Dr Maguire says the two-hour e-learning was developed with the help of more than 20 NSW Health clinicians, along with people with a lived experience of an eating disorder.

“Health workers will learn about the function of eating disorders, the therapeutic approach required to effectively provide meal support - including maintaining clear boundaries, how to provide distraction during the meal and encourage normal eating behaviors and to provide that important supervision and support after mealtime.”

Dr Maguire says she acknowledges the challenges faced by health professionals in delivering this crucial part of treatment.

“Health professionals need to provide emotional support, observe and notice, and challenge the eating disorder.

“It is difficult to strike the right balance between empathy and gently challenging the eating disorder and guiding person towards recovery. I am confident that InsideOut’s new online program will help clinicians to do this”

“I thank you, our health professionals, for undertaking this important work with this client group,” she said.

*Meal Support in the Hospital Setting* is a two-hour e-learning and is free for NSW Health staff.

It can be accessed at <https://insideoutinstitute.org.au/resource-library/meal-support-in-the-hospital-setting>

**Declaration:** Developed with funding support from NSW Health

### **About the Inside Out Institute**

*The InsideOut Institute for Eating Disorders – a collaboration between the Sydney Local Health District and the University of Sydney’s Faculty of Medicine and Health, based at the University’s Charles Perkins Centre – aims to ensure every Australian living with an eating disorder has access to the best possible care by rethinking eating disorders from the ‘inside out’. Visit [insideoutinstitute.org.au](https://insideoutinstitute.org.au)*

**Support available:**

**If you are experiencing distress and need support, you can contact:**

**The Butterfly National Helpline 1800 ED HOPE (1800 33 4673)**

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 46 36.

Suicide Callback Service: 1300 659 467

MensLine Australia: 1300 789 978

Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800

Headspace: 1800 650 890

ReachOut: [au.reachout.com](http://au.reachout.com)

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