DOWN ON THE FARM

Depression and mental health in the rural South

INSIDE: □ The issues □ Farmer profiles □ Expert advice □ Support networks
Mental Health Foundation introduction

By JUDI CLEMENTS

BUILDING flourishing and mentally healthy communities is a challenge and nowhere is this more so than in rural New Zealand.

Living and working in the country means working long hours, often in isolation from extended family, whanau and friends, with pressures on mental health such as the increased pace and complexity of life.

Many farmers come from the old school where stoicism and toughness is considered a strength and a desirable trait. They tend to view the inability to cope with life’s problems as a weakness and are reluctant to acknowledge any form of mental or emotional vulnerability.

While the perceived stigma associated with mental illness can make it seem more difficult to seek professional support, there are many organisations and professionals who can help.

Judi Clements

Friends and family are also likely to be aware of changes in personality and habits and recognise there may be problems and want to help, if given the chance.

If someone you know — your family, friends, mates — appear to be having problems, the best thing you can do is to ask them if they want to talk. Flourishing communities — through positive communication and support — is a new focus for the Mental Health Foundation. It’s also the theme of Mental Health Awareness Week 2010 — ‘Flourishing for everybody: feel good and function well.’

‘Flourishing’ is about focusing on the good things in life. When someone is flourishing they experience, most of the time, positive emotions, positive interest and engagement with the world around them, and meaning and purpose in their lives. They are less at risk of mental health problems and have better social relationships.

Remember, the first steps are talking, listening and understanding — and thinking about how you, your family, friends and community might flourish.

Ministry of Health programmes

www.moh.govt.nz
www.likeminds.org.nz
www.depression.org.nz
www.thelowdown.co.nz

The Journal is a ground-breaking online self-management programme for New Zealanders experiencing mild to moderate depression. Located on the NDH website, www.depression.org.nz, The Journal teaches people techniques they can use in everyday life to help manage their own depression. Former All Black John Kirwan fronts the television and online advertising campaign promoting The Journal and is also the coach of the programme.
Overview: Why is the mental health of farmers at risk?

MENTAL health research in New Zealand shows that 20% of New Zealand's population will be affected by some type of mental health issue during their lives. Depression, which can be triggered by stress and anxiety, is one of the most common mental health issues. Untreated depression can increase the risk of possible suicide. Statistics released by the chief coroner showed reported suicides in Otago and Southland had increased 62% from 37 suicides in 2007-08 to 60 suicides in 2009-10. Nationally, figures have remained almost the same, with reported suicides numbering 541 in 2007-08, 531 in 2008-09 and 541 in 2009-10. This is about 50% higher than the road toll.

The tendency of the traditionally staunch farming sector to tough it out leads to a culture of silence where the issues creating stress and depression are often not addressed and therefore solutions cannot be found. Federated Farmers dairy chairman Vaughan Templeton, of Riverton, said farmers did not like having problems unless they could deal with them.

"We can be very frustrated by issues that we can't fix or [if we have] not been shown a way to fix them. He also said many people were uncomfortable talking about other people's problems.

"Most of us are pretty hopeless about [providing] support and have got no idea about being supportive. We are not good at that sort of stuff,"

He said farmers commonly reacted to a problem by going out on the tractor or finding a job to do on the farm.

"We do spend all that time by ourselves muddling things over."

But the experts say it is important to talk about concerns and worries — and that through addressing problems with others, solutions can be found.

Stressors

FINANCIAL issues are one of the biggest stressors for people in the agricultural sector. These include poor and uncertain returns, the strength or weakness of the New Zealand dollar, increasing input costs, huge debt pressure from the banks.

Then there is increased operational compliance required by national and territorial authorities, and a raft of central and local government legislation to adhere to. Rural Women of New Zealand Pakawau branch president Joyce Wylies said her members said the Resource Management Act and other bureaucracy was a big stress factor for landowners who were trying to deal with councils and the whole consent process, with all the financial costs, hearings and uncertainties involved.

"There is more paperwork, stock reconciliations, OSH inspections, focussing works records and drench diaries, not to mention all the issues we should be making submissions on such as council plans, ETF trading schemes, animal identification schemes (Nazi), drinking water, diesel tax, etc. There are so many regulations now trying to fix things that were never broke."

She said the increasing rural and urban divide also created stress — farmers felt more isolated as more people moved away from rural areas with no connection to farms and necessary farming practices.

Farmers are also at the mercy of the weather — drought, floods, snow and hail. These can ruin fruit and crops, kill vulnerable stock, destroy prime grazing or growing land — and with it the season’s profits.

Natural disasters, such as Canterbury’s magnitude 7.1 earthquake on September 4, can cause widespread devastation and despair.

Animal health is also a concern. Mr Templeton said a stressful issue for farmers was not being able to feed their stock.

"We are always happier with grass [growing] than lots of money and no grass. People don't quite get it that when livestock are hungry that is when farmers are most stressed."

Agricultural workers also often work long hours, have little or poor sleep and few holidays.

Drug and alcohol use is common — and can be a symptom or a cause of mental health problems.

Support

In past generations, most rural residents had extended family close by, so there was always someone to talk to, to “get things off your chest”. But as the population has become more mobile and young people less inclined to view farming as a career choice, the family networks are spread far and wide.

On top of this, there is declining attendance at churches and traditional meeting places like salerooms are diminishing in number. Mrs Wylies said there was less time to sit down and chat with visitors and professionals — as they were all struggling with more paperwork and less time — and more impersonal contacts with the increased use of cellphones and email.

However, despite what can be a perception of isolation, it is important those in the rural sector realise there are support services available. "Fonterra and DairyNZ are supportive and we do have the rural support group."

Attitudes

FUTURE Directions Network is a group of Southland mental health support groups and organisations. Network co-ordinator Richard Harriss said there was a need for an increased awareness of the services available and what steps to take to access counselling or further help.

“The general public’s attitude towards mental health has vastly improved on 20 years ago, but there is still a way to go,” Mr Harriss said.

“There is still some ignorance in the community regarding mental illness and more work needs to be done to reduce discrimination and stigmatisation. We need to keep chipping away at it.”

Men

PUBLIC Health South promotions officer Anita Tizard said rural men adopted more risky health behaviours than women, such as tobacco and alcohol use, and had more injuries and motor vehicle accidents. She said they were also less inclined to seek help for mental health issues.

“There is a perceived culture of shame around mental health issues in rural communities, with many people who cannot and will not discuss emotional issues.” Ms Gold said.

Many attempt to hide their mental health problems because of the fear of negative community attitudes and the stigma associated with them. The result can be social and physical isolation, with some people not accessing the services available to them.

“This is about 50% higher than the road toll.

Rural men often chose to "suffer in silence."

"Being the strong, silent Southern Man locks you into a place that makes it hard to share when things get difficult.

"Most men draw on their strong determination and strength of character during difficult times. Those same strengths and qualities, such as resilience and being capable and coping, can be the same reasons men often do not seek mental health support or general health care.”

Q&A

What is stress?

Stress is a normal physical response to changes or events that make you feel threatened or upset. When you sense danger (real or imagined) the body’s natural defences kick into high gear — a “fight or flight” reaction, or stress response. The danger lies in too much stress or stress over a long time.

What are the warning signs?

The warning signs of stress can include:

- Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities usually enjoyed.
- Loss of energy and constant tiredness.
- Persistent worrying about little things.
- Changes in sleeping patterns: sleeping difficulties or problems waking up.
- Indigestion or stomach upsets, skin rashes, muscle tension and pain.
- Shortness of breath or shallow breathing.
- Memory, concentration or decision-making problems.
- Doing risky or careless things (excessive drinking, gambling, drug use).
- Continuous feelings of anxiety and tension.
- Feeling irritating or developing a feeling of helplessness.
- Sensitivity or over reaction to what might seem a normal situation.
- Isolation by avoiding people, places and events.

What can you do?

If it is not practical to remove the cause of stress then it is possible to manage your body’s reaction to stress:

Talk about your worries: Talk to a friend, partner, parents, counselor or clergy.

Prioritise your tasks and make your work habits as efficient as possible.

Eat well and avoid foods that increase tension — coffee, tea, chocolate, alcohol and soft drinks.

Make time to exercise, take time out of the work and spend time with family and friends.

Solve problems: Try to find a solution to conflict, learn to be more assertive and say NO.

Get sufficient sleep.

Put fun and laughter into your life.

Talk to your doctor: They will let you know what options are available.
Financial pressures stressful, but good planning can help

LASTAIR Gibson has seen a fair bit of stress and distress caused by the economic recession. He has listened to farmers who are having financial or personal troubles talk about the depression they have experienced and isolation they feel as they struggle to keep their farm, their home and their family together.

Mr Gibson, of Alastair Gibson Farm Consultancy Ltd, Gore, is contracted to the Southland Rural Support Trust to provide financial advice to farmers who are struggling and who have come to the notice of the trust.

He said he had talked to about two dozen farmers in the past year and, of those, about a quarter had required more in-depth help.

When asked to become involved with a farmer who has difficulties, his first step is to talk to them about their financial position and to determine what sort of help is needed.

He said sometimes farmers did not want to admit there were any difficulties with the farm and would prefer to bury their head in the sand and avoid the issues.

“They view having difficulties as a sign of weakness or failure and tend to keep bottling things up. Then suddenly they can’t cope and they feel worthless,” Mr Gibson said.

Sometimes he meets a farmer who is on the verge of packing his bags and leaving the farm.

He said it was important to make them realise it was not their fault and to get them feeling better about themselves, then put plans in place to deal with the problems.

Often, finances are only one thread in the overall picture.

There may be marriage or relationship difficulties, depression and anxiety, animal health issues, feelings of isolation and sometimes family violence or drug and alcohol addiction.

In these cases, he will point them in the direction of more qualified support.

During the past couple of years, the financial scene in agriculture has changed.

Whereas once banks were more than willing to lend money, especially to the dairy sector, they are now often required to institute a higher debt ratio for clients.

That means clients, often farmers who have taken loans to buy, convert or make improvements to the farm, and who have provided adequate security in the past, now have to find additional security to meet the increased debt ratio [security in relation to loan], which has on some occasions gone from about 40% to 50% to about 65% or 70%, which is putting additional pressure on people.

Mr Gibson will sit around the kitchen table with the farmer and his partner, his advisers, such as the accountant, the lawyer, agricultural consultant, banker, sometimes the creditors, and the shoe box of unpaid bills to work out a plan of attack.

Sometimes a farmer is forced to sell, so Mr Gibson can be involved in negotiations between buyers and creditors and the farmer.

“In the heady days of two years ago, people were being offered above the asking price for farms and banking approval was available within a couple of hours of filling in the applications.

“It also meant many people were getting into their first farms who would probably never have a chance to do so.

“Now there are some who are hanging by their fingernails.”

He said while banks generally had been reasonably patient and understanding, in some cases they had forced a farm sale after a client ran into insurmountable difficulties.

However, sometimes there are options other than selling the family farm.

“We work out a business plan, trying to get the best option for them over a long period of time, maybe three to four years. That gives the financiers some level of confidence.”

As farmers get more stressed, they do not work as well and making decisions — even everyday ones — can be harder than usual.

Depression can result and they spend their days going through the motions of routine work, driving themselves all day, and going home exhausted at night but they cannot sleep.

They know there is work to be done but they procrastinate.

“They also tend to withdraw from people,” Mr Gibson said.

He advised farmers who were struggling to discuss the problems with their friends and family as they would be surprised by the level of support available to them.

“There is always a way around [the problem].”

“It is more about getting people to feel good about themselves and the business is secondary,” Mr Gibson said.
Getting through depression

FORMER sheep farmer Lindsay Wright, of Wendonside, has one simple message: “It is OK for men to talk about their problems.”

And he is prepared to share his own story of depression in the hope it encourages others to seek help and improve their lives.

In 1986, Mr Wright bought the 470ha sheep and beef farm which had been in his family for several generations.

Although he, like most other farmers, went through the cyclical highs and lows associated with the sheep industry, seven years ago things got worse.

“During 2000 to 2002, farming couldn’t be better,” Mr Wright said.

“Things started to go wrong in 2003 when [farming] returns started dropping.”

“I kept looking at my books and we were slowly going backwards. I couldn’t believe everything could turn around so quickly. Eventually everything got on top of me and I couldn’t see how to get out of it.”

He thinks that was when his depression began.

As the economic problems got worse, he borrowed more and more money from the bank.

“I just assumed the position would come right, because in the past it always had. In the 1980s, I went from $25 a lamb to $14 a lamb overnight when subsidies came off and we survived. But this time it didn’t.”

“I kept trying to make the cashflow balance, but I was just building up hard-core debt, which was extremely frustrating after 20-odd years of farming.”

As the financial situation worsened, he tried to talk to his wife about it but kept it from the rest of his family.

“I am not sure if she knew the whole impact or not.”

He said he felt a constant “lump” or “rock” in his chest, which got heavier as the farming situation worsened.

Eventually he realised he had to make a decision about his business. Should he sell, lease, continue as he was, or put a manager on?

However, he said he could not make that decision and the options constantly rampaged through his head.

“Those four decisions [options] were going around and around in my head and that went on for about six months. I would lie awake at night. I would sleep from 1pm to 3am, then wake up until 5am and then go back to sleep for half an hour.”

He said by keeping his problems to himself, they seemed 10 times bigger.

He said he was getting by “on automatic pilot” but one day at lambing time he “came to a standstill while driving in the paddock in his ute.”

“I stopped and put my head on the steering wheel and asked ‘what am I going to do?’ I had had enough and knew I had to talk to someone.”

He made an appointment with the Gore Counselling Centre as he wanted to speak to somebody he didn’t know personally.

“I parked 20 metres down the road from the centre and walked along the footpath like I was just going down the road. I sneaked sideways into the driveway and into their door.”

He said the councillor asked “do you have a problem?”

“I said ‘yes I do’, and for the next half hour countered my eyes out. I couldn’t say a thing. As soon as I admitted the situation, it all just flooded out.”

He said the councillor let him cry and later started talking about what they were going to do.

“From that day, I parked my car right outside the front gate and walked in with my head up. I was terrified of losing everything I had worked for.”

He spent the next nine months working with the counsellor to sort through his issues.

“I had all the answers within me, I just had to find them.”

He said the lump in his chest took three or four months to go, and it took longer for him to realise the situation was not his fault.

With the counsellor’s help, he made the decision to lease his farm.

“In the end it was so simple. I did not want to sell and I could not carry on as I was, so I was left with two choices. I could lease it out or put a manager in. The manager was going to cost me even more money so leasing was the only choice.”

“I have no idea why it took me so long to make a decision. It was so clear and it has been a good decision.”

“Now I see what the lesions had done on the day, I realise how much energy I had not put into it. I was just existing.”

Even though a decision had been made, it was not enough to stop his marriage breaking up and in the past four years he has not farmed. However, once the farm was leased, he began to focus on the rest of his life.

Mr Wright has been involved with Toastmasters for several years, and is the new chairman of the Southland Rural Support Trust.

“I was at a speaker at a conference saying ‘sometimes life just happens to you. But it’s not about what happened, it’s what are you going to do about it?’”

He said that sentence made an impact on him.

After he admitted to himself that he had a problem, he found it easier to talk to other people, friends and family about it.

“If I ever felt a downer coming on I would pick up the phone and call someone, just to talk and get things back in perspective. The support from friends was huge once I was prepared to let them know what was going on.”

As he recovered, he turned his story into a Toastmasters speech, which he presented several times. He also talked about his experience in a previous article in Southland Life.

“People came up to me after that [Toastmasters] speech and said they had been through similar things. The same with the SRL article.”

“I had several people stop me in the street to talk about the article and they said it tickled all the boxes for them.”

But he also recalls being invited to speak at one meeting where he realised the people listening to him were really uncomfortable.

“Men still have trouble with the subject until they have been through it.”

“Farmers are an independent bunch and tend to be pretty insular. We just get on with it and we can believe we can do it ourselves,” Mr Wright said.

“The message I want to get across is that it is OK for men to talk about their problems.”
Conditions can be managed

Q&A

What are the signs someone may be suicidal?

Warning signs include:
- Someone threatening to hurt or kill themselves, direct or indirect statements, e.g. “I wish I were dead”.
- Looking for ways to kill themselves, e.g. seeking access to pills, weapons etc.
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide.
- Hopelessness.
- Rage, anger, seeking revenge.
- Acting recklessly.
- Feeling trapped.
- Increasing alcohol or drug use.
- Withdrawing from friends, family or society.
- Anxiety, agitation, inability to sleep or sleeping all the time.
- Dramatic changes in mood.
- Giving away possessions.
- Saying there is no reason for living, or having no sense of purpose in life.

The presence of warning signs will not necessarily identify when, or even if, a person will attempt or complete suicide. Suicide risk can vary from minute to minute and day to day.

FORMER Southland farmer Ken Ballantyne has a shadow following him and it will be there for the rest of his life.

Mr Ballantyne has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and depression, and before his illness was recognised three years ago, he tried to commit suicide.

Mr Ballantyne and his wife Sue are the 2010 Ballance Farm Environment Awards Supreme Winners in the Horizons Region for their 550ha sheep and beef property at Aria, between Te Kuiti and Taumarunui.

Originally from Woodlands, near Invercargill, they moved to Orakei Korako, near Taupo, after successfully drawing a 250ha farm in a Lands and Survey ballot in 1984.

In 1996, they moved to the Aria farm.

To the outsider, Mr Ballantyne had a top-performing farm, no debt and a loving family and appeared to have no worries.

But appearances can be deceiving and Mr Ballantyne is happy to talk openly about his conditions and his suicide attempt in an effort to help eliminate the stigma attached to mental illness.

“If I can help one person, I’ll have achieved a great deal,” Mr Ballantyne said.

He said when he was in the “deepest hole of depression”, he was sure his family and friends would be better off without him.

“In my case it couldn’t have come any closer, but now that I am better I realise that I would have ruined their lives also, if I had taken my own,” Mr Ballantyne said.

He said everyone suffered “ups and downs” from time to time.

However, the symptoms of severe depression included lack of sleep, weight loss and waking up in a hot sweat.

Depression sufferers might find it hard to face people other than their immediate family and they lacked motivation, he said.

“You just want to hide from the world by sleeping and you can’t get out of bed to do anything.

“If you know of anyone with these symptoms or someone that has had a complete change of character, talk to them and encourage them to get help.”

Mr Ballantyne said with the right help, most depression sufferers did get better and could lead normal lives.

“I will be forever grateful to my wife and family especially.

“It is not easy on the immediate family but I know that my children have learned from watching their father suffer from depression and it has given them a better understanding of mental illness and made them better people for it.

“I am also forever grateful to the mental health system in New Zealand for getting me well.

“The doctors, nurses and mental health workers do a wonderful job for very little recognition.”

He has told his story publicly several times since winning the Farm Environment Award, and he has received support from neighbours, family and friends.

However, he said some people could not face him after his suicide attempt.

“People don’t want to talk about it.

“Eighty percent of people would cross the street to avoid you.

“You can’t blame society for not wanting to be interested as it is hard to understand unless they go through it themselves.”

He is more aware than ever of managing the conditions, including eating and sleeping properly, taking the prescribed medication and he also receives counselling when necessary.

“I used to drink a bit, but I have now given up alcohol as it is a depressant.

“It makes you feel good short-term but all it does is hide reality.”

The couple still work hard but make sure they take time out for themselves.

“My wife Sue really looks after me well.

“When you are working by yourself, as many farmers are, it is important to get off the farm — go to the bach or play sport.

“I isolated myself, and it was the worst thing I did.

“Don’t forget about you. It is important to keep well. Think of the future and enjoy life now, too.”

Mr Ballantyne shares his story in the hope that people will realise that they can get better and achieve things in life, despite depression and bipolar disorder — and he is happy to lend an ear to someone who might not be ready to talk to a professional but might want a friendly chat.

“Obviously I am not a doctor or a counsellor, but as someone who has experienced, learned from and recovered from depression, I am only too willing to talk in the strictest confidence to anyone who feels they might be suffering from depression.”

HELPING OTHERS: Ken and Sue Ballantyne are the 2010 Ballance Farm Environment Awards Supreme Winners in the Horizons region for their 550ha sheep and beef property at Aria, between Te Kuiti and Taumarunui. They are happy to talk about Mr Ballantyne’s depression in the hope it may help others with similar problems.

CONTACT DETAILS:
- Ken and Sue Ballantyne
  - (07) 877-7570

PHOTO BALLANCE
Dealing with grief — and keeping the farm running

The sudden and unexpected death of a husband or partner is devastating, leaving the wife and family numb with shock and often handicapped by grief.

When it happens with farming families, there is the additional stress of running the farm — milking the cows or feeding the stock, which has to be done as stock cannot be left to fend for themselves while the family grieves.

ACC statistics show on average there are 30 sudden deaths on farms each year. These do not include deaths from medical conditions. Deaths are often as the result of a farm accident and sometimes suicide.

Although rural communities rally to support the family during the early days after the death, it is the months afterward that can be just as stressful, and if there is any support available to rural farming women, that is when depression can set in.

That is the conclusion Dairy Women’s Network trustee and Tuatapere dairy farmer Michelle Wilson reached when researching a project for the Kellogg Rural Leadership programme.

She wanted to find out just what level and type of support there was for rural widows, investigate the roles of rural professionals, police and Victim Support in sudden death rural situations and make people aware of the importance of long-term financial planning and making a will.

Mrs Wilson initially surveyed 25 farming women from throughout the country about whether they discussed and planned for the future with their partners should one of them die suddenly.

She found 40% had not discussed what would happen with their partner if one of them died.

Most women knew where to go for business support, and 64% had discussed with “rural professionals” what would happen if they lost their partner.

More than 70% of the couples had a family trust, although only 44% reviewed it regularly.

She also interviewed a police representative, rural professionals, and six rural women whose husbands had died suddenly in the past 10 years.

Four women were from Southland, one was from the Waikato and one was from the Bay of Plenty.

One husband had been ill, one took his own life and the rest died as a result of accidents on the farm.

While her interviewees called the initial community support “amazing” and “humbling”, once it faded away and people gradually returned to their own lives, the widows and their families were left to “go back to normal” and “go it alone”.

Mrs Wilson said it was hard for younger widows to find support and information that related to continuing to run a farm on their own.

One of the key findings was the lack of awareness of what happens just after a sudden death.

The police would be involved but Mrs Wilson said one woman felt they had come to interview her as a suspect.

They found police in full uniform carrying radios to be intimidating and suggested they would be less so in shirts uniforms.

They did not understand, if their husband or partner died from an accident on the farm, why the body had to remain where it was for what seemed like a long time.

“This is because police are required to carry out a scene examination and that may take a while,” she said.

They will also interview all the parties involved.

All the women felt that, although they understood why Victim Support had been called, they did not want them there during that early stage.

“They did not want a stranger in their kitchen telling them it was going to be OK while their husband was lying in the paddock,” she said.

“All they wanted was family and close friends, not strangers.”

Some said they would have appreciated someone visiting them in the months after the death when depression was likely to set in.

She said the women were left to look after the children and run the farm at the same time.

Mrs Wilson said four of the six women were still running the family farm and some had been under pressure to sell.

They told her “we have worked hard to run the farm [as a couple] so why should I sell?”

“Running the farm kept them motivated, gave them a purpose and determination.

“Most said ‘I am going to give this two or three years and if I can’t make it work, then I will look at selling’.

“The women have all improved and extended the farming businesses they run.

“One said because it was in an equity partnership and the other because it was a part of a trust and they were the best financial decisions for all parties.

“Mrs Wilson talked to rural professionals such as bank managers, accountants, lawyers and agricultural consultants.

“The professionals recommended having appropriate structures, wills and plans in place, which should be reviewed every two years, being organised, having powers of attorney, having joint names on bank accounts and paperwork, credit cards, vehicle papers and telephone accounts, ensuring contracts are dated and signed correctly, ensuring trustees understand farming, and all professionals should be included in discussions about the future.

“Women have said that often they are awake at 2am or 3am and that is when they do most of their thinking about the farm.”

She said an online site would be useful.

“If a problem or question is worrying them they can go online, ask that the call ‘dumb’ questions, and know they have dealt with it so they only need to wait for the email from the expert with the answers to arrive the next day.”

She was told a contact list of widows who had gone through similar situations would be useful.

She has also received expressions of interest from an insurance representative and the police, who want to look at her findings to see if they can improve their approach.

“I feel as if I have ripped the girls of if I don’t take this further.”

Rural support: Dairy Women’s Network trustee Michelle Wilson, of Tuatapere, completed a research project earlier this year into the level of support available to women who were suddenly bereaved.

Q&A

What do I do if someone seems suicidal?

Take their thoughts and feelings about suicide seriously and listen to them without judgment.

Encourage them to get help and talk to someone about how they feel.

Approach the following for advice:

- Primary health care professional or GP.
- Community mental health service (your local district health board or hospital).
- Samaritans: 0800 726-666.
- Youthline: 0800 376-633.
- Depression helpline: 0800 111-757.
- The Lowdown: www.thelowdown.co.nz
- Depression website: www.depression.org.nz

In an emergency:

If you are seriously concerned about someone’s immediate safety:

- Call 111 or take them to the Accident and Emergency Department at your nearest hospital.
- Contact the nearest hospital or psychiatric mental health emergency service/mental health crisis assessment team.
- Remain with them until appropriate support arrives.
- Remove any obvious means of suicide (guns, medication, cars, knives, rope, etc.).

What do I do if a fatal accident or sudden death occurs?

- Call 111.
- Call a family member or friend for support.

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Youth have different needs

Teenagers and young adults working on dairy farms have special needs and must be treated with care if they are to stay healthy and safe, says Canterbury GP Dr Janne Bills.

Farmers who pay extra attention to the requirements of young stock sometimes do not realise young staff need similar consideration.

"The growth in dairying has meant that many young and inexperienced staff have been recruited," Dr Bills said.

"For some, it is their first job away from home and they are unprepared for the punishing work hours that are sometimes expected of them." 

"We've had 16 to 18-year-olds coming in with simple viral infections, absolutely exhausted, and needing time off work."

Stress and lack of sleep is also obvious in younger adults. Dr Bills has seen herd managers in their 20s promoted to farm management, but the increased responsibility for managing and leading a team is tough on relatively inexperienced people when staff are young, unskilled and accident prone.

Sleep

SLEEP is vital. "Everyone needs sleep for physical and mental restoration, but, during the adolescent stage of growth between the ages of 11 and 22, sleep patterns need careful management," Dr Bills said.

"In mature adults, the sleep hormone melatonin comes in about 7pm to 9pm, and by 9pm or 10pm they're feeling drowsy."

"However, in teenagers and young adults, the melatonin comes in perhaps at 11pm or 12pm, and that's why they stay up late and then you can't get them out of bed in the morning."

"It concerns me that many young dairy workers under 22 have to get up at 4.30am and function properly."

"At that age, they need at least nine hours' sleep daily, and they should be encouraged to take it."

"Sleep debt causes a lot of problems for them and their employers."

Dr Bills suggests the following:

- Encourage staff to take the sleep they need — at least nine hours for those under 22, and eight hours for mature adults.
- Let adolescents sleep in two to three times per week (rostered).
- Young people want a social life, so make allowances for that.
- Encourage winding down before bed, avoiding loud music, video games, bright lights, coffee.
- Have hot food readily available so staff can come and go at any time — do not expect them to cook for themselves if they are working long hours.
- Have a shared breakfast or lunch meeting at least once a week for team building.

Nutrition

ENSURE young staff eat well. Irregular, unhealthy eating and insufficient food are common with young farm workers.

Young people are at a crucial age nutritionally, and it concerns me that these kids get up early and don't have anything other than a coffee until 8am, then head out to work again after breakfast," Dr Bills said.

"At the end of a long day they are exhausted and even if they know how to cook they don’t feel like it, so they go to the nearest takeaway shop."

Strategies for better nutrition include:

- Snacks during milking, large breakfast, large lunch, small dinner.
- More steaming and baking and less frying.
- Supply low-fat, low-sugar snacks to eat during milkings and between meals, and ensure that they can be eaten from a wrapper and not handled.
- Supply capped water bottles and real fruit juice instead of soft drink.
- At busy times, supply at least one cooked meal a day as well as snacks.
- Encourage team concern for each other, and if someone is not coping send them home for a rest.
- Encourage team meeting at least once a week for team building.
- Organise food so it is not a hassle. Have hot food readily available so staff can come and go at any time — do not expect them to cook for themselves if they are working long hours.

Busy periods

IT is important to plan for busy times.

- At calving and other times when long hours are worked, plan to ease burdens and improve health and safety.
- Arrangecasual help to relieve full-time staff.
- Give an afternoon off on a rotational basis.
- Encourage team concern for each other, and if someone is not coping send them home for a rest.

- Give an afternoon off on a rotational basis.

Social contact

UNSOCIABLE working hours make it more difficult for youngsters to take part in sports, clubs etc, and their relative isolation sometimes leads to boredom or depression and alcohol and drug abuse.

Canterbury dairy farmer, employer and registered nurse Gina Gardner recommends using rosters that limit work intensity and allow for quality time off.

"Being able to socialise is very important to the physical and emotional health of adolescents," Ms Gardner said.

"Our staff are rostered to work an average of 5.5 days per week, eight days-on-two-off, then eight-on-thrice-off, which gives them every third weekend free."

"We also have strict clauses around smoking, alcohol and drugs in our employment contracts, which our employees agree to."

"This helps limit behaviour that may endanger them and other staff." She said farmers undermined their own objectives if they did not have healthy staff.

"Hungry and tired people are going to be irritable, impulsive, more accident-prone and less productive," Ms Gardner said.

"And, if they catch a disease, then they could be off work for some time. "It’s a case of prevention being a lot better than cure."
Confidentiality vital part of counselling in a small town

COUNSELLOR Monty Temple, of Manapouri, knows client confidentiality is one of the key factors to be aware of as a practitioner working in a small town.

He has a private counselling practice and works in Te Anau and Lumsden.

His work includes some contract work for various agencies.

As Manapouri and Te Anau are small towns, he is likely to bump into clients outside scheduled appointments, such as at social events and the supermarket, so sometimes he and the client lay down ground rules at the initial appointment.

“Sometimes I am working with people who are more than just acquaintances,” Mr Temple said.

“Transparency is really important. We have to make clear personal and professional boundaries.

“It is important to do so to assure clients’ safety in regards to confidentiality and it also engenders respect.”

They also establish goals and outline what they want to get out of the sessions, at the first meeting.

“About 70% to 80% of the time those goals are met and it is wonderful to see that happening for individuals, families and couples,” Mr Temple said.

While many of Mr Temple’s clients are referrals from various social agencies, some are individuals from tough and self-sufficient farming families who have reached the end of their tether after struggling to deal with personal issues on their own.

These issues might include relationship problems, depression or excessive stress and worry.

While being self-sufficient has its advantages, it can also mean farmers are less inclined to talk to someone about their problems, preferring to keep their head down and carry on working.

“That independence and pioneering spirit is what forged Southland [and Otago] into the region it is today,” Mr Temple said.

“They come from strong stock who have had to survive really rough conditions as farmers.

“They did that because they had strong family ties and were part of tight farming communities, which probably nurtured an inner strength.”

As they had extended family around them, they did not have to ask for help because it was already there.

“They could still hold their cards close to their chest but the support was there.

“Unfortunately though, as communities are now more mobile, the support networks that were once available to them may not be there now.”

However, many farmers still tended to be staunch and resilient and did not want to talk about their problems.

“The strong, silent men and women are still there but the support from their communities and/or families is either reduced or completely gone.”

Mr Temple said financial and relationship stress were common issues for farmers.

“When they are stressed it can have impacts on their health and on their families,” he said.

“That is when anxiety and depression can start to get a foothold.”

He said typical life struggles, such as dealing with finances, child rearing, running a business or working long hours could contribute towards relationship breakdowns.

As the stress increased, people sometimes said or did things they later regretted, resulting in interpersonal distance and decreased intimacy.

“Couples often find they have little time together, and even when they do, they are too tired or stressed to enjoy it.

“This type of situation can lead to one or both partners feeling misunderstood or unappreciated.

“These types of unhelpful patterns can carry on for years without ever being recognised, and then one day someone finds him or herself sitting in my office not knowing how they have come so close to signing divorce papers.”

One of his key messages to men and women is: ‘If you are having a hard time, find someone to talk to’.

“It might be a friend, a family member, or a professional, but try not to wait ‘til it is unbearable.”

He said between the agencies he did contract work for, and funding held by a local Te Anau trust, he could provide affordable counselling for anybody in the Te Anau area. He hopes to eventually be able to work in a similar way in Lumsden.

He said people often self-referred or were referred to him by friends or family, but other times they were referred through the local medical centre or one of the agencies he did contract work for, such as Relationship Services, the Rape and Abuse Support Centre Southland, Child Youth and Family.

Q&A

How do I find a counsellor and/or doctor?


How can I work out if a doctor or therapist is right for me?

Choosing a therapist can be difficult.

Here are some questions you might like to ask.

Call the prospective therapist and find out:

■ What training and/or experience does the person have?

■ What references do they have?

■ How long are the sessions?

■ How many sessions do they average per client?

■ Are they caring and empathic?

■ Do they have a manner that you feel comfortable with?

■ Do you feel confident about them as a person and as a practitioner?

■ Do they listen to what you have to say?

■ Do they ask you questions?

If you find you and the practitioner you have chosen to work with are not compatible, you are free to choose another person or service.

CONTACT DETAILS:

Monty Temple
021 496-611
monty_temple@yahoo.com

Get it all out: Counsellor Monty Temple, of Manapouri, sometimes has clients from farming backgrounds who have reached the end of their tether after struggling to deal with personal issues on their own. He tells them it is OK to talk to someone about those problems.
**What can contribute to stress in the rural sector?**

In the rural workplace, the factors that can cause stress include:

- Weather
- Adverse events and natural disasters.
- Time pressures.
- Financial pressures.
- Unfair and/or unequal returns in the market.
- Rising costs.
- Lack of support from being geographically isolated.
- Relationship issues.
- Long hours, shift work.
- Complicated or unpleasant tasks.
- Poor training.
- Feeling isolated or undervalued.
- Bullying or harassment.
- Physical environment (for example, noise, dirt, dangers, poor equipment, working in bad weather, difficult animals).
- Juggling work and home life.
- Technology, which can be frustrating, especially if it breaks down.

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**Vital support network for farmers**

**RETIRED farmer and former Environment Southland chairman Ted Loose, of Te Anau, is a trustee of the Southland Rural Support Trust.**

The trust offers practical and moral support after an adverse event, such as snow, flood or drought, or natural disaster, such as an earthquake. It also helps farmers and their families cope with stress, depression and other issues, often brought on by financial problems or a poor economic climate.

The Southland Rural Support Trust is part of a national network of rural support trusts. The Southland trust was established in 2008 with support from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr Loose and wife Mereanna, a former mental health nurse, JP and deacon in her church, have raised seven children on a farm through tough economic times and adverse weather events, so they can recognise stress and depression in fellow farmers.

Some of that stress is a result of the farmer feeling alone and isolated, and that is becoming more common as small rural communities become increasingly fragmented.

That has led to a reduction in the traditional support network that used to be commonplace years ago.

Mr Loose said a farmer who was worried, anxious about his livelihood and stressed could become isolated from his family and neighbours and, without the strong community structure, was even less likely to talk about his problems.

Mr Loose said they raised a big family and while finances were always a worry, they did not have the huge debt level that was common today.

"Those high debt levels are forcing some farmers to sell their farms, and in the present market, there are very few buyers," Mr Loose said.

He said he could understand why some farmers became stressed and the strong, silent culture among many farmers did not help.

He said when he was farming, if he had a problem, he could talk to his neighbours or friends and find an answer.

"It wasn't often that someone did not have the same experience and have an answer," he said.

"The problem with farmers is most are not prepared to admit they have got a problem and be prepared to talk about it with a neighbour or friend. I know some cockies have problems and don't even talk to their wives about it." Mrs Loose said often a chat over a cup of tea would help them realise they were not the only ones in that particular boat.

"They chat away and they lighten up when they realise someone else has the similar problems — they are not the only ones," Mrs Loose said.

"Generally, most try to hide their problems and it is pretty hard for them to admit there is one, unless they are with quite close friends.

When Mr and Mrs Loose had had enough of the farm, they made sure they had an occasional night out, to give themselves a break.

"It is really good for guys to get off the place and do something else for a bit." Mrs Loose said many farming wives worked off-farm at other jobs, or they belonged to church groups or Rural Women New Zealand branches, which gave them a brief break, but the farmer often was unable to do that.

Younger farmers can attend field and demonstration days, monitor farms days and discussion groups, which will get them away from their home environment for half a day.

As a trust member, Mr Loose said he was able contact the trust to ask for a consultant to call on a farmer who might be having trouble with one or more aspects of his life.

A bit of professional advice, sometimes paid for by the trust, might be the help they need.

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**CONTACT DETAILS:**

Janet Gregory  Co-ordinator  Southland Rural Support Trust  03) 208-7883 or 027 222-4005  janet.gregory@landcare.org.nz
Advice for adults and children

**In support:** Otago Rural Support Trust co-ordinator Irene Scurr.

"She refused to do it and when she eventually admitted why, [she] said that somebody else's father had committed suicide in a shed. She was afraid of what she might find. Children need to be kept informed.

**Remember to have fun**

Ms Scurr said they encouraged community activities such as barbecues and advised farmers to have some fun, even if it was a simple night out with mates.

"People forget to have fun. [During difficult times] people can often question why they are farming. If they can remember some of the joys, then they can remember why they are doing it [farming]."

**Q&A**

**What is a rural support trust?**

- Rural support trusts are a part of a national network of trusts which offer rural communities practical help and advice during adverse events such as drought, flood or snowfalls or natural disasters such as earthquakes.
- They can also direct farmers to those who can provide professional assistance for personal issues. For example counsellors, financial advisers or mentors.
- The trusts have links with Civil Defence and farming-related groups throughout the district, which can offer support when necessary.
- Trust members are usually farmers themselves who know the situation other farmers may be going through.

**CONTACT DETAILS:**

- Otago Rural Support Trust co-ordinators:
  - David Mellish, of Kakanui
    - (03) 439-5966 or 021 102-9890
    - drdavem@hotmail.com
  - Irene Scurr
    - (03) 454-6198 or 021 188-9807
    - scurbiko@xtra.co.nz

"At that time [mid 1980s], I had women ringing me saying 'my husband wouldn't talk and I am concerned he will do something,'” Mrs Oakley said.

"I was a representative for Rural Women New Zealand and I could see at the time with the calls I was getting, we had to put something in place."

"We now have a very good team behind us."

ShesaidalthoughtheynowworkedmorewithCivilDefence,after-event care was still a primary function.

"Once the event or disaster and initial clean-up had taken place, people thought things would return to normal for those affected, but they did not."

She said the trust sometimes gave a rural family who was having a hard time, financially or with other concerns, a break away from the farm and their problems.

"One farmer had to move out of his farm and did not have enough money to shift his furniture so we paid for it."

"We don’t have to wait for government agencies to do something..."

She said dairy farming families increasingly figured in their cases.

"We had a young couple with two young children who came down here to a dairy farm and were new to the area. I visited them and found they had nothing in the cupboard so I went to the foodbank, which loaded me up with groceries, then I got some fresh vegies and meat and gave it to them..."

She said the trust also dealt with farming families who experienced financial problems and depression.

"It is pretty difficult if you have worked on the farm all your life, then have to walk away. It is a huge mental strain..."

The area has experienced several suicides, trust members regularly attend training courses.

"We had three [suicides] on farms a few years ago during the drought, mainly on dairy farms..."

She said she and the trust also received funding from the Government to establish a national rural phone line several years ago.

"Older farmers are not so good at talking but a lot of the younger ones go to discussion groups and it is a different ball game for them."

"Nowadays, farmers [and their wives] are more aware of their financial situation..."

Women are more inclined to talk, while the men tend to go out and work on the tractor.

"People forget to have fun..."
Canterbury organisations work to reduce stigma of mental illness

Following the success of a mental health discussion evening in the small rural town of Oxford, Canterbury, last year, which addressed the issue of stigma relating to mental illness, a group of social agencies and community trusts are planning to do it again.

It is hoped the follow-up event will be held in November.

The magnitude 7.1 earthquake on September 4, which has caused widespread damage and distress and is taking a psychological toll on people, means the meeting will be particularly relevant.

However, as the organisers were busy with other post-quake work, they were unable to confirm a date for the meeting at this stage, Mental Health Foundation mental health promoter Grant Cooper said.

Mr Cooper said last year’s event, called “Let’s cut out the bull and talk about mental health,” was developed to help create an environment where people with mental illness in Oxford would feel confident accessing help earlier and be more accepted and supported in their community.

Mr Cooper said this year’s event would probably focus on getting organisations and agencies to talk about the support and resources they offered.

“The aim is to increase awareness about the support available,” Mr Cooper said.

He said they wanted to provide accurate information and resources about the issues.

Oxford has a population of about 2000, with a further 1500 living in the surrounding rural district.

Social Services Waimakariri organised a planning workshop for community agencies early last year.

Those attending wanted to develop a project to reduce the stigma and discrimination experienced by people with mental illnesses.

The aim is to increase awareness about the support available.

Representatives from the Oxford Community Trust, the Mental Health Foundation, Comcare Trust, Supporting Families Canterbury, Rural Canterbury Primary Health Organisation and Social Services Waimakariri formed a working party and decided to hold the mental health discussion evening last October.

Mr Cooper said research had shown traditionally people in rural communities tended to be self-reliant and could regard seeking professional help as “in conflict with community values,” so they did not visit mental health services as often.

He said the working party asked a group of local and trusted people who lived or worked in Oxford or surrounding areas to sit on a panel and answer pre-written and audience questions about mental illness.

Panel members included Olive Webb (clinical psychologist), Ken Terry (local policeman), Jo Seagar (local businesswoman), Rodney King (Oxford school counsellor) and Bec White (Oxford Community Trust Youth Worker).

Nearly 60 people, as well as representatives from 11 mental health organisations, attended.

“Anecdotal feedback from the participants at the event was positive,” Mr Cooper said.

“As a result of the event, more people have contacted services for further support. Overall, there was greater local community awareness of community support available and more local interest in information on mental health.”

Copy: Mental Health Foundation

Q&A

How can I be a good listener if someone comes to me for help?

■ Be silent, let the person get their feelings out.
■ Say things like “I see” so they know you are still listening.
■ Be non-judgemental.
■ Stick to the subject, don’t digress.
■ Show you have heard and understood by reflecting their feelings back at them, e.g., “You sound pretty annoyed”.
■ Put aside your own problems while you listen.
■ Ask questions to make sure you have understood.
■ Don’t advise, but go over the options.
■ And remember, people communicate by more than talking. Take note of their facial expressions, body language and voice tone.
Southern Rural Life

A CHARITABLE TRUST

Community worker: Riverton Community Charitable Trust

Sharleen Carran

As a community development worker, Sharleen Carran, of Riverton, is often one of the first faces people see when they seek help for social and health issues.

Ms Carran works for the Riverton Community Charitable Trust. There are five community workers who each work for one of five community trusts in Southland and they meet regularly to discuss activities and issues of concern.

When a client is referred to her or approaches her to ask for help, she will talk with them to find out the extent of their needs and what outcome they hope for.

Confidentiality is guaranteed and sometimes all that might be required is a chat over a cup of tea or regular home visits, but if more intensive support is required she will put programmes involving the appropriate professionals in place using her network of contacts and links to social, health and welfare agencies.

She often works with people in the agricultural sector.

"One thing I do see is a lot of alcohol and drug addiction."

She said, like many isolated areas, young people who wished to socialise had to drive significant distances, with the accompanying drinking and driving dangers.

Ms Carran sometimes works with newly arrived migrant farm workers.

"It is a new culture for them, often with language issues, and while they might not have mental health issues, there is potential for depression."

She said rural people often dealt with problems their own way.

"The farming community has a 'can do' attitude and they get in there and get things done," she said.

"That attitude comes through strongly and that is good to see."

However, society's structure had changed significantly, even from about 70 years ago when more extended family members stayed at home, rather than left the farm to work.

"There was always someone home to talk to. Nowadays, when people get home they need to cook tea, get kids sorted and do all sorts of things, then they might get 10 minutes for themselves.

"Life has got so much busier and they struggle to find time for themselves."

"I think a good, well-balanced lifestyle promotes mental wellbeing."

Lay minister: Supporting Families

Jenny Campbell

Jenny Campbell, of Mensburn, is a lay minister in the Dunedin Diocese of the Anglican Church, lay enabler for Te Anau and Winton parishes and a member of the Lay Ministers Association.

She also works for SF (Supporting Families for Mental Wellness) Southland.

Mrs Campbell visits families in Western and Central Southland as well as Invercargill, to offer support and ideas to help them cope as well as providing a listening ear, often over a cup of tea.

If they need information about support networks or other services, she can direct them to the appropriate place.

"We support the families to stay healthy because if they can't stay well they can't help their family members," Mrs Campbell said.

"For me it is holistic. If we can help the person to get a balanced lifestyle — physical, mental, emotional and spiritual — and to have support networks, then they have a much greater chance of living a happy and fulfilled life."

She has seen first-hand the decline in strong rural communities during the past few years.

"We don't seem to connect in our local communities as much as we used to."

While traditional community and neighbourhood support networks there was an increasing tendency to remain in isolation.

"You can't remain in isolation and stay a healthy person."

While the church used to be one of the key supports for families in the rural communities, attendance was declining through natural attrition as well as people's increasing mobility and the fact they were becoming busier with other activities.

However, Mrs Campbell was optimistic there was a trend towards more rural cohesiveness.

"We are so mobile now, but with people looking at the price of petrol, maybe we will go back to being more community-focused and more aware of our neighbours.

"The community, friends, family and whanau need to 'hold the hope' for people when they are affected by mental illness.

"People don't get well or unwell in isolation."

CONTACT DETAILS:

- Riverton Community House
  - (03) 324-8206
  - rivworker@xtra.co.nz

Field worker: Supporting Families

Joanne McArthur

Joanne McArthur, of Manapouri, is the Supporting Families field worker for Fiordland, Northern and Eastern Southland.

She also looks after the education portfolio and arranges support groups for families and caregivers in the area.

"There is a real demand for mental health education," Mrs McArthur said.

She said she surveyed the families supported by the agency and asked them what they would like to have education sessions about.

They said they wanted to hear presentations from psychiatrists and find out more in-depth information about various disorders.

"Last year, we did sessions on depression and anxiety as well as personality disorders."

"This year, we have held sessions on drug and alcohol issues as well as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder."

"Many people with mental illnesses also have drug and alcohol issues, which is called a co-existing disorder."

"When you have that, you are not only doubling the problems, you are multiplying them."

"Another facet of her role is to encourage and advise family or friends about the best strategy to help their family member or friend."

"Some people don't realise they have a problem at all. Family members can struggle with that."

"Our role is to support family members and discuss options and strategies."

If the family is worried about someone not being aware of their deteriorating mental health or who might need treatment, they can discuss their concerns with the family doctor.

Supporting Families also ran support groups which allowed family members or carers to talk to other people with similar experiences, Mrs McArthur said.

They realised they were not the only ones with issues and they could share ideas, hopes and support.

"There are tears and laughter as well."

The group was recently given $750 from the Meridian Community Fund to buy 26 books about a range of mental health issues, which are located in the Te Anau library and can be accessed through every Southland District Council library.

CONTACT DETAILS:

- SF Southland
  - (03) 218-2100
  - sfsf@xtra.co.nz
  - www.supportingfamiliesnz.org.nz

Q&A

What is SF?

- Supporting Families in Mental Illness New Zealand (SF) is a free, confidential, mobile service, which supports families/whanau and carers of people experiencing mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues.

- There is a specific service for children and young people.

- The service supports family members as they turn support the person that they care for.

- Staff listen and offer hope, encouragement, discuss options and help develop coping strategies. This support can include a field worker working with an individual family member, or with a family group or within a support group.

- Supporting Families also provides advocacy services for individuals with local services or at a national level such as making submissions on legislation.

- Supporting Families provides learning opportunities for family and the community about mental health topics. Staff speak to groups in the community about the service and how people can effectively support someone who is experiencing mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues.

- There are a wide range of resources and information available through Supporting Families, covering topics around mental health, drug and alcohol-related issues, community services and agencies available, as well as self care for families.

- Family members can either be referred by someone else, such as another community organisation or mental health service, or they can contact the organisation directly.

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September / October 2010
Advantages to accessing service at your GP’s practice

How can neighbours and friends help?

Faye Hanna, of Gore, is a primary mental health clinical nurse specialist and works for the Primary Mental Health Brief Intervention Service.

The service is a joint initiative between Southland District Health Board’s Mental Health Services and Southland’s four Primary Health Organisations.

Ms Hanna said if a person felt anxious or distressed, often the first place he or she would go for help was to their GP or practice nurse.

“They can then be referred to the Brief Intervention Service, which is government-funded and can provide up to five sessions free, or to the Community Mental Health Service if the GP feels the issue is more serious or urgent,” Ms Hanna said.

“Sometimes, pressures or a combination of pressures can have a negative impact on our health, setting us up for distress, which can be overwhelming or make it difficult to get back on track.”

She said clients were seen at the GP’s practice, which had several advantages.

“The idea of attending anywhere associated with psychiatry or mental illness accentuates [people’s] fears they may already hold about ‘going crazy.’”

Being seen in a GP’s setting helped encourage the concept that the practice provided a holistic approach to healthcare and the “normalising of emotional difficulties”.

During the client’s first session of up to 90 minutes, Ms Hanna develops a rapport with the client and carries out an assessment to identify their ongoing needs. She outlines their rights as mental health consumers and emphasises that confidentiality is paramount.

“It is important that the client understands they can talk openly, as they often have the fear of people finding out. It can be a scary thing for people coming to talk about themselves, especially for men who are often not in the habit of talking about their feelings.

“It may be I see them just once so they are able to offload some of the pressure. That might be enough, or maybe I see them up to five times, depending on the problem and also their recovery, or I may refer them to an alternative service.”

She will talk to them about what has been going wrong for them, their background history and experiences, and look at their ability to concentrate, their memory, sleep patterns and level of functioning.

“Sometimes, the behaviours we adopt for coping can have a worse impact, such as increased use of alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, coffee working harder, eating more, or eating less.”

She said people had various issues in their lives which contributed to stress, anxiety and depression.

There is a huge range of severe personal hardships experienced by people out there — financial, relationship and emotional.

“I am sometimes staggered at how much and how they cope with the hardship in their lives.”

She said clients often felt like they “were losing the plot” and were the only ones who felt distressed, depressed and isolated by their illness.

“Often, the reality of what is really going on is obscured by the way they are feeling so they don’t see what they need. Their stress could be building up for months and they haven’t recognised it and suddenly are in floods of tears in the GP’s office.”

She said they could be sleep-impaired, which made things worse.

Mrs Hanna said the next step was to outline a plan for coping with the client’s problems.

“Often people don’t see any options and they might be in a bad space but don’t know how to take steps to move forward. We look at their strengths and abilities they have to work with.”

“I am not in the business of giving advice but I am in the business of listening and helping them to help themselves.”

Sometimes, people just need to be able to voice what is wrong.

“They need somebody objective enough to look from the outside in and conceptualise what is wrong and consider options for making some changes or taking better care of themselves.”

She said part of the sessions involved re-educating clients to take care of themselves, such as eating properly, learning to relax, especially during stressful times, and getting enough sleep and regular exercise.

“Learning to relax is important to everyone and farmers are often not good at this as they never have time. The important part is that when they don’t have the time is when they need it the most.”

Together, she and the client, and sometimes their family, identify what needs to change and how that could happen.

That may include the use of medication such as antidepressants.

“Sometimes medication may be needed to improve functioning before they can look at the issues compounding the problems in their lives.

“An important part of therapy is the prevention of future relapses so [we work on] education around the illness and recognising the early signs. I encourage them to develop some problem-solving skills and life balance.”

Q&A

Faye Hanna

“Learning to relax is important and farmers are often not good at this as they never have time. The important part is that when they don’t have the time is when they need it the most.”

Tina Simmonds

Treatment for stress, anxiety and depression

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There is a huge range of severe personal hardships experienced by people out there — financial, relationship and emotional.

“I am sometimes staggered at how much and how they cope with the hardship in their lives.”

She said clients often felt like they “were losing the plot” and were the only ones who felt distressed, depressed and isolated by their illness.

“Often, the reality of what is really going on is obscured by the way they are feeling so they don’t see what they need. Their stress could be building up for months and they haven’t recognised it and suddenly are in floods of tears in the GP’s office.”

She said they could be sleep-impaired, which made things worse.

Mrs Hanna said the next step was to outline a plan for coping with the client’s problems.

“Often people don’t see any options and they might be in a bad space but don’t know how to take steps to move forward. We look at their strengths and abilities they have to work with.”

“I am not in the business of giving advice but I am in the business of listening and helping them to help themselves.”

Sometimes, people just need to be able to voice what is wrong.

“They need somebody objective enough to look from the outside in and conceptualise what is wrong and consider options for making some changes or taking better care of themselves.”

She said part of the sessions involved re-educating clients to take care of themselves, such as eating properly, learning to relax, especially during stressful times, and getting enough sleep and regular exercise.

“Learning to relax is important to everyone and farmers are often not good at this as they never have time. The important part is that when they don’t have the time is when they need it the most.”

Together, she and the client, and sometimes their family, identify what needs to change and how that could happen.

That may include the use of medication such as antidepressants.

“Sometimes medication may be needed to improve functioning before they can look at the issues compounding the problems in their lives.

“An important part of therapy is the prevention of future relapses so [we work on] education around the illness and recognising the early signs. I encourage them to develop some problem-solving skills and life balance.”

CONTACT DETAILS:

- Talk to your GP or practice nurse to be referred to the Brief Intervention Service.
Index of mental health providers and support organisations

**RURAL SUPPORT TRUSTS**

**NORTH CANTERBURY**

Dorothy Oakley
- 0800 277 845
- (03) 318 1742
- 021 250 5168
- spudlafm@xtra.co.nz

**MID-CANTERBURY**

Free phone 0800 787 254

Allan & Sue Baird
- (03) 308 7594
- 027 435 0141
- allan.baird@xtra.co.nz

Tim Silva
- (03) 308 1890
- 021 505 137
- tms@nicolaw.co.nz

**SOUTH CANTERBURY**

Freephone: 0800 787 254

David Hewson
- (03) 612 6367
- 021 720367
- hewson@farmside.co.nz

Rob Phiskie
- (03) 692 2887
- (03) 687 7333
- 0275 966 443
- rphiskie@clear.net.nz

Raymond Jackson
- (03) 688 6144
- 0274 438 1622
- rayj@clear.net.nz

**OTAGO**

Andrea Ludemann
- Trust administrator
- (03) 437 1544
- 027 65 96 800
- andreab@bnarachfam.co.nz

Irene Scurr
- (03) 454 6198
- 021 188 9807
- sscurr@btvta.co.nz

David Mellish
- (03) 439 5966
- 021 102 8980
- drdavem@hotmail.com

**SOUTHLAND**

Janet Gregory
- (03) 208 7883
- janet.gregory@landcare.org.nz

Russell Falconer
- 0274 318 173
- russel.tit@slid.zuk.co.nz

**Q&A**

**What is The Journal?**

- The Journal is a ground-breaking online self-management programme for New Zealanders experiencing mild to moderate depression.
- It was launched earlier this year by the Ministry of Health as part of its National Depression Initiative.
- It is on the National Depression Initiative website, www.depression.org.nz
- The Journal teaches people techniques they can easily use in everyday life to help manage their own depression.
- Former All Black John Kirwan fronts the television and online advertising campaign promoting The Journal and is also the coach of the programme.
- Southern mental health practitioners spoke to for this feature said the programme and the television advertisements had gone a long way to demystify mental illness in the eyes of New Zealanders and to encourage all people, especially men, to acknowledge that it is acceptable to seek help.
- "John Kirwan said it's OK to say things are not right, and people are becoming more aware of that reality," lay minister Jenny Campbell, of Mosburn, said.
- Supporting Families Fiordland, Northern and Eastern Southland field worker Joanne McArthur, of Manapouri, said Kirwan had had "a huge influence".
- "I hear time after time that if John Kirwan has it [depression] then it is OK for me to talk about it".

**SUPPORTING FAMILIES (SF)**

**CANTERBURY / PEGASUS BAY**

- Level 3
- 199 Armagh St
- PO Box 22086
- Christchurch 8142
- (03) 366 9284
- Fax: (03) 377 7947
- sfpg@xtra.co.nz

**AORAKI**

- 77 Grey Rd
- Timaru
- (03) 684 4523
- sfia@xtra.co.nz

**WAITAKI**

- Community Mental Health Service
- 2 Trent St, Christchurch
- (03) 434 1130
- stwaldallinc@hyper.net

**OTAGO**

- 34 Prince Albert Rd
- St Kilda, Dunedin
- (03) 455 5973
- Fax: (03) 455 0035
- admin@sfsouthland.org.nz
- www.supportingfamilies.otago.org.nz

**CENTRAL OTAGO**

- 28 Ashworth St
- Alexandra
- (03) 448 9303
- office@sfcentral.org.nz
- www.sfcentral.org.nz

**SOUTHLAND**

- 366 Dee St
- PO Box 475, Invercargill
- Freephone 0800 494 262
- (03) 21 82 100
- office@sfsouthland.org.nz
- www.sfsouthland.org.nz

**RURAL WOMEN NZ**

- (04) 473 5524
- enquiries@ruralwomen.org.nz
- www.ruralwomen.org.nz

**DAIRY WOMEN’S NETWORK**

- (07) 838 5238
- info@dwn.co.nz
- www.dwn.co.nz

**MINISTRY OF HEALTH, HEALTHLINE**

- 0800 611-116
- info@health.govt.nz
- www.health.govt.nz

**LIKE MINDS, LIKE MINE**

- likeminds@mentalhealth.org.nz
- www.likeminds.org.nz

**THE MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION**

- info@mentalhealth.org.nz
- www.mentalhealth.org.nz

**THE LOWDOWN**

- www.thelowdown.co.nz

**SUICIDE PREVENTION INFORMATION NEW ZEALAND (SPINZ)**

- info@spinz.org.nz
- www.spinz.org.nz

**LIFELINE**

- 24 hours a day.
- 0800 543-354.

**SAMARITANS**

- 0800 726-666.

**YOUTHLINE**

- 11am to 11pm every day.
- 0800 376-633.

**DEPRESSION HELPLINE AND WEBSITE**

- 0800 111-757.
- www.depression.org.nz

**Q&A**

**How do I access mental health services?**

- The first port of call is seeing your doctor.
- To access services directly, you could call your local mental health service (under Hospitals in the front of the phone book), but some may require a referral from your doctor. Or you could call the Ministry of Health Healthline on 0800 611-116.
- If it is a crisis or emergency situation, contact the crisis team at your local mental health service (also under Hospitals in the front of the phone book).
- If there is immediate risk of harm to self or others, ring the police on 111.

**Still have questions?**

- Send your questions to the information officers at The Mental Health Foundation: info@mentalhealth.org.nz
Is life not ‘sweet as’?
Then let’s talk about Mental Health.

If this is you or someone you care about, take action!

For more information visit
www.mentalhealth.org.nz
ph (09) 300 7030 or email:
info@mentalhealth.org.nz
To talk with someone call
Lifeline on 0800 543 354

Mental Health Awareness Week
4—10 OCTOBER 2010

 Movember

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REGISTER AT MOVEMBER.CO.NZ
AND GROW A MO

MEN'S HEALTH PARTNERS

Cancer Society

Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand