

One in four teens will have mental problem

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ONE in four North Shore teenagers will experience a mental health problem in the course of a year.

This "hidden problem" that has a huge impact on the community was discussed at a mental health forum, focusing on youth, at Chatswood on Tuesday.

Professor Gin S Malhi, director of the Clinical Assessment Diagnostic Evaluation Clinic at Royal North Shore Hospital, said, until a few years ago, there was "not much focus" on youth issues.

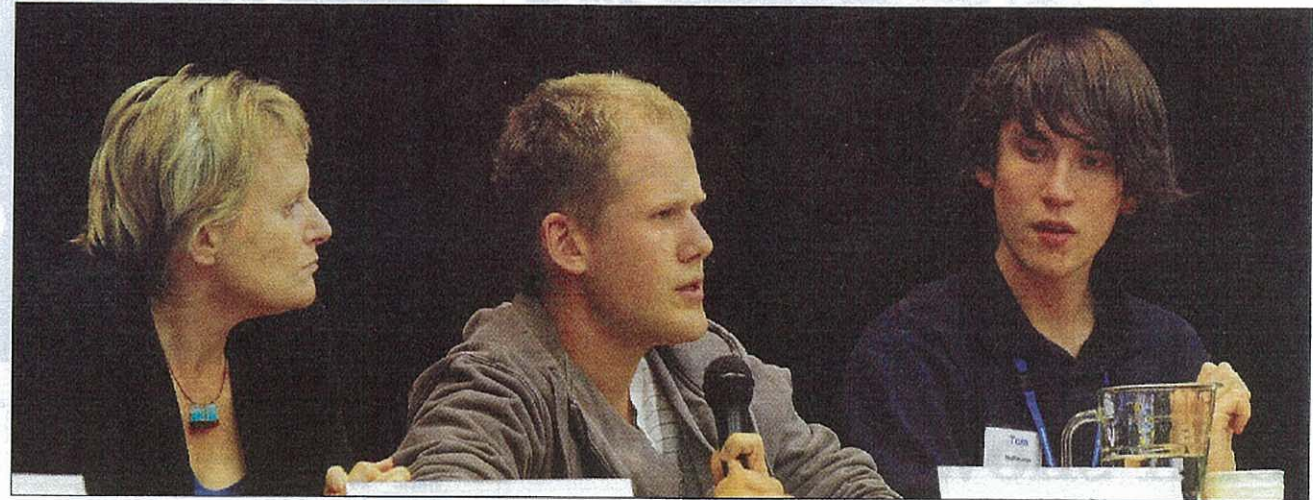
"One in seven pupils attending North Shore schools, out of 1000 students, will experience mental health problems and related alcohol and substance misuse each year," Prof Malhi said.

"One in four of these adolescents will go on to receive professional help and our treatments have never been better.

"The problem is still the stigma associated with the illness and the lack of awareness."

He said one way to address the problem was to examine people in a 12 to 25-year-old age group, rather than separately as adolescents (12-18 years) and adults.

The main disorders affecting young people are anxiety, sub-



SPEAKING OUT: Team leader Eda Devoti, Sam Maclean and Tom Hoffman at this week's mental health forum.

stance misuse, schizophrenia, mood, attention deficit and disruptive behaviour, eating, and learning and communication.

"Psychological problems are common in youth but children are robust and will bounce back," Prof Malhi said.

Meanwhile, the director of North Shore Ryde Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Dr Ann Wignall, said it was import-

ant to "get in early" to identify problems.

"Mental health problems are usually first identified at school," Dr Wignall said. "Youth workers and school counsellors can provide training and support for the first point of contact."

If you or a family member or friend needs help, call the Northern Sydney Mental Health Helpline on 1300 302 980.

No one immune from this illness

IT is ridiculous to believe mental health issues do not exist on the North Shore, says Willoughby MP Gladys Berejiklian. Speaking after the forum, she said she was proud to become the first shadow minister for mental health, in 2005. She was "still fighting" to maintain mental health ser-

vices in Chatswood rather than move them to Royal North Shore Hospital. "The prevalence of mental health problems affecting young people is huge," Ms Berejiklian said. "It doesn't discriminate on age or background, but problems generally start in youth. No one is immune."