

The war against mental illness

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Professor Mike Owen, Director of the University's new Neuroscience and Mental Health Research Institute has said the time has come to declare war on mental illness.

He has used a briefing of AMs at the Welsh Assembly to say that there has never been a better time to launch a concerted effort to tackle severe [mental illness](#).

Mental illness and dementia are major disease burdens. From autism and ADHD in children, to adult psychiatric disorders like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, to neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer's, Huntington's and Parkinson's disease in the middle aged and elderly - mental illness in all its guises remains a massive burden on society across the world. The cost to the UK economy of mental ill health is of the order of £77bn per annum and £23bn per annum for dementia. In the UK only 5% of medical research is into [mental health](#), despite 15% of disability resulting from disease being due to mental illness.

"These dwarf figures for any other class of disease, and mental illness is the leading cause of disability in Europe. There is no indication that this situation is improving and as the average age of the population increases it is likely to worsen", says Professor Owen.

"The development of new therapies for severe disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, Alzheimer disease and ADHD is severely hampered by our lack of understanding of disease mechanisms. However, given recent advances in genomics and neuroscience, there has

never been a better time to launch a concerted effort to tackle these conditions."

However, Professor Owen, who has worked on the genetics of psychiatric and neurodegenerative disorders for more than 20 years, believes that the challenges are not just scientific. He is leading the new Research Institute at the University which positions mental health at the heart of the University's priority areas of action.

"Mental illness continues to be stigmatised and one of the consequences is that mental health research is grossly underfunded in comparison to other major classes of disorder. As well as resources, the "War on Mental Illness" will require a change in mindset for many.

"We will need to remember that these severe disorders are brain diseases which are tractable to scientific research and which will ultimately be treatable. We will also need to include more patients, carers and health professionals in research and make sure that we realise the largely untapped potential of the NHS to contribute to this effort.

"Wales can boast some of the world's leading researchers in psychiatry and neuroscience. Investing adequate resources now will ensure that Wales continues to be at the forefront of research in this area and takes a lead in developing and implementing the new research agenda."

Provided by Cardiff University

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