

## **MEDIA ALERT** **9 November 2007**

### **Interview opportunities: National Psychology Week**

A positive outlook on life is one of the themes of National Psychology Week, 11 – 17 November 2007, during which psychologists throughout Australia will showcase the ways that psychology can make a difference to the quality of people's lives.

Detailed below is a series of story opportunities we thought would be of interest to your audience during National Psychology Week.

- 1. Are your bad habits hurting the environment?**
- 2. Beating chronic conditions is really a case of mind over body**
- 3. Top tips on parenting after separation**

#### **1. Are your bad habits hurting the environment?**

We have all heard the water saving messages, but do you find that you're still taking 10 minutes to get out of the shower?

Environmental psychologist Dr Susie Burke said environmental messages have to battle against deep seated bad habits that have developed over many years.

Dr Burke said there are two steps to breaking bad habits: recognising that you have a responsibility and taking action to break the bad habit.

"Environmental inaction comes from thinking that one person cannot make a difference. Get informed, do some research to educate yourself on how big the problem really is and recognise the responsibility you have in securing our environmental future," she said.

"A common mistake is to make a change in one big leap, such as moving from a 10-minute shower one day to a four-minute shower the next," she said. "This shocks the body and often results in a relapse."

Dr Burke recommends setting targets to reach your final goal and allowing your body to adjust.

***Dr Susie Burke is available for interview***

#### **2. Beating chronic conditions is really a case of mind over body**

Chronic conditions such as those caused by unhealthy lifestyle choices are still Australia's biggest killers – so why are people so unwilling to change?

Professor Bob Montgomery, president-elect of the Australian Psychological Society said most people know what they are meant to change, but the problem is knowing how to make and maintain that change.

"Despite all the healthy eating messages, Australia still has a major malnutrition problem, involving excessive eating of food with poor nutritional value, resulting in poor health and growing rates of obesity," said Professor Montgomery.

"Is there really in Australia an obese person who doesn't know they should eat less and exercise more, or a smoker who doesn't know they should quit?"

Professor Montgomery said the major obstacles to people living in healthier ways are psychological and relate to them not being able to motivate themselves in lasting ways.

“The key is to learn effective goal-setting, to identify and overcome obstacles, and to prevent or manage relapses. Healthy living must be practical, affordable and enjoyable if ordinary people are going to make a long-term change,” he said.

***Professor Bob Montgomery is available for interview***

### **3. Top tips on parenting after separation**

Forty-three per cent of marriages in Australia end in divorce, with recent ABS figures showing that 50,000 children a year experience the effects of separation and divorce.

APS Executive Director, Professor Lyn Littlefield said that children are very resilient, but children of divorced parents are still at twice the risk of psychological problems as those from non-separated families.

“The transition between marriage and separation can be a difficult time for a family and it has the potential to expose children to increased conflict and the potential to disrupt vital parenting functions,” she said.

“Children need a secure emotional base after their parents separate, exactly as they needed before.”

When advising separating parents, Professor Littlefield recommends they focus on building a secure emotional base for their children, and cooperate where possible on issues of parenting.

“A child’s developmental and emotional requirements need to be considered by both parents. This should be taken into account when constructing visiting schedules and parenting plans.”

“Parents need to recognise that the needs of their child will be separate to their own during this time,” said Professor Littlefield.

***Professor Lyn Littlefield is available for interview***

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#### **To schedule an interview, please contact:**

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**APS referral service:** The APS provides a free referral service for the general public, GPs and other health professionals who are seeking the advice and assistance of a qualified psychologist, online at [www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au) or call 1800 333 497.

For more details about National Psychology Week: [www.psychologyweek.com.au](http://www.psychologyweek.com.au)