

Controversial clinic opens doors in Australia

BY REBECCA JENKINS

AN unconventional treatment for eating disorders is available for the first time in Australia.

Developed by Sweden's Karolinska Institute, the Mandometer Treatment method will be available at a Melbourne clinic.

The system has sparked debate because it is based on the controversial theory that eating disorders are not a form of mental illness.

Instead, the symptoms of depression and anxiety are believed to be a result of starvation, hypothermia, physical hyperactivity and a disordered social life.

The treatment method, already used in clinics in Europe and the US, uses an interactive computer system, the Mandometer, that aims to retrain patients to eat normally.

Patients' meals are weighed using the Mandometer and their rate of eating and level of satiety are compared



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against normative levels.

Paediatrician Dr John Court, who founded the eating disorders clinic at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital, said the program had many benefits and a low relapse rate.

"It doesn't work for everybody — no treatment does. For those who enter the treatment program the success rate is 75%," he said.

However, Dr Court, who is now in private practice, acknowledged the method had caused controversy because it challenged beliefs that the primary method for treating eating disorders should address the mental health aspects.

Associate Professor Janice Russell, associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Sydney, said aspects of the therapy were similar to programs already on offer.

However, she disagreed with the view that eating disorders were not primarily a mental illness and had reservations about the Mandometer feedback system.

"It's a gimmick — some people like it and benefit [but] I don't think it's a very big contribution to counselling people and assisting them in eating behaviour," she said.

The Melbourne clinic will initially support patients who have already received treatments at sister clinics overseas, before a full program is established.