

Hope for mental health research

Kim Smee

A new multimillion dollar “supercharged” brain scanner is helping North Shore researchers unlock the secrets behind mental illness.

Professor Gin Malhi and Dr Jim Lagopoulos of Royal North Shore Hospital’s new Clinical Assessment Diagnostic Evaluation unit announced the completion of their high-tech brain scanner, ARCHI (Advanced Research and Clinical Highfield Imaging), on Thursday.

The research team has already made promising preliminary findings indicating bipolar patients use

different parts of their brain when responding to emotional stimuli.

With its ability to simultaneously study brain activity and neuro-physiological responses such as sweating, the team hopes ARCHI will further this research, allowing a better understanding of our most complex organ.

Professor Malhi said the scanner would also enable more critical research into and diagnosis of mental illnesses such as depression, schizophrenia and anxiety disorder, because the team would not have to use scanners booked for clinical processes.

“There is already not enough ac-

cess to scanners clinically so research time is always seen as an impost,” he said.

Professor Malhi said ARCHI was a “supercharged” brain scanner, the likes of which had never been available for research-only use in Australia. “It’s like a Porsche with added golden handles and all the other nice stuff. As a ballpark figure, I’d say it is worth about \$7 million.”

The University of Sydney-owned scanner will also be used by other groups researching the psychological impacts of chronic fatigue syndrome, brain injury and pain management.



New RNSH general manager Sue Shilbury, Dr Jim Lagopoulos, Prof Michael Field and Prof Gin Malhi with the new scanner.

Photo: Danielle Butters