Schizophrenia

It is estimated that one in a hundred people in Australia have this illness. This is a serious disorder that is believed to be caused by chemical imbalance in the brain. The disorder affects how a person thinks, feels and acts, and is characterised by a variety of symptoms including hallucinations, delusions, withdrawal from social activities, incoherent speech and impaired reasoning.

Mood Disorder

Mood disorders include depression and bipolar disorder (also called manic depressive disorder). Symptoms include mood swings such as extreme sadness or elation, sleep and eating disorders, and changes in activity and energy levels. Suicide or risk taking behaviours may be a problem with these disorders.

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses. The three main types are: phobias, panic disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorders. People who suffer from phobias experience extreme fear or dread when exposed to a particular object (e.g., snakes) or situation (e.g., being in a closed space). Panic disorders involve sudden, intense feelings of terror for no apparent reason and physical symptoms which are similar to those of a heart attack. People who have obsessive-compulsive disorder try to cope with anxiety by engaging in repetitive, ritualistic behaviour (such as constant hand washing) or by repeating words or phrases.

Eating Disorders

Two major forms of these disorders are anorexia nervosa and bulimia: these are serious, potentially life-threatening illnesses. People with these disorders have a preoccupation with food and an irrational fear of being fat. People with anorexia severely restrict their food intake: people with bulimia have cycles of bingeing (consuming large quantities of food) and purging (self induced vomiting or abusing laxatives). Behaviour may also include excessive exercise.

Personality Disorders

This category refers to people who have maladaptive and inflexible patterns of behaviour which impair their functioning in relationships, in their work, and in their social lives. They cope poorly with the ups and downs of everyday living, and can cause much distress to family and friends through their behaviour. Types of personality disorders can range from individuals who are odd and eccentric to
those who are dramatic and self-centered; others may be very dependent on others.

**Note:** Your TAFE Library will have books and videos on the various types of mental illness if you wish to read further in this area.