



FIGHTING TRAUMA: Grant Richardson.

PHOTO: Hannah Somerville.

Fighters get no time to heal

Natassja Wynhorst

Emergency service workers with post-traumatic stress disorder are unable to access the treatment they need because of time constraints and high costs, according to a clinical psychologist.

The 16-week trauma recovery program at Hollywood Hospital treats patients experiencing psychological injuries.

Australasian Society for Traumatic Stress Studies former president Doug Brewer said a fear of missing work hours meant many people did not enrol in the program.

"The difficulty with the 16-week program is the patients won't sign up for it because it involves taking too much time off work," he said.

Cockburn firefighter Grant Richardson joined the program after being diagnosed with PTSD.

He said many people decided not to take the course because it cost between \$25,000 and \$40,000.

"If it wasn't for insurance there is no way I would have been able to afford this," he said.

Mr Richards said his GP had originally prescribed antidepressants.

"From there I was sent to a number of different clinics," he said.

"Eventually I was passed on to a

doctor that finally diagnosed me with PTSD."

Police Post Trauma Support Group president Esther McKay said many officers denied suffering from PTSD and refused help.

"Some people are always going to say, 'oh no, I'm not affected by that', but we want people to know there is support," she said.

Ms McKay said all officers should undergo resilience training as part of their initial police training program.

"Resilience training involves teaching people what to look for in terms of signs that show they are not recovering from a traumatic event," Ms McKay said.

"This shows they are ready and more willing to seek treatment early, rather than let PTSD develop as a result of the trauma."

Dr Brewer said the early treatment of PTSD was essential.

"The earlier the better," he said. "We need to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of people who put their hand up to say, 'I need help'."

Dr Brewer said the hospital also offered a three-week intensive program for about \$9,500. This program was, however, only the first step in the recovery process.

"It's not a treatment that is expected to bring a total recovery to someone's trauma," he said.