What is the disability?

Bipolar was formally known as "manic depression". The symptoms of Bipolar Disorder are characterised by:

- Extreme highs where an individual feels full of energy, euphoric and confident. They may have strange beliefs, act out of character and make impulsive decisions.
- Extreme lows where an individual feels down, tearful and lacks confidence. They may lack energy, lose interest in things and feel more irritable than usual.

Facts:

- Affects 1 in 100 adults.
- Usually starts between the ages of 15-19 and rarely after the age of 40.
- Men and Woman from all backgrounds are equally as likely to develop this condition.
- Episodes can vary in both length and frequency.
- If an episode of mania or depression is very severe individuals can develop psychotic symptoms.

Where can I find out more?

- www.mind.org.uk
- www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Where to get help in College?

If you have this diagnosis or have experienced the symptoms described above for a while you can get advice and support from:

- Community, Wellbeing and Student Outreach by emailing welfare@rhul.ac.uk.
- The University counselling service in FW 171, call in or email counselling@rhul.ac.uk to arrange an appointment.
- The Disability and Dyslexia Service in FW 149 and 143, call in or email disability-dyslexia@rhul.ac.uk to arrange an appointment.
- The Clarence Medical Centre in FE, call their reception on 01784 443131 or call in to book an appointment.

Please note these services are open between 9:00am – 5:00pm Monday-Friday during term time.

Useful numbers:

Royal Holloway Security: 01784 443063
NHS: 111
Out of Hours medical care: 01753 865773
Samaritans: 08457 909090
Surrey Police (non-emergency): 101

The information and quotes in this flyer are from mind.org.uk and www.rcpsych.ac.uk.

Bipolar Disorder

1% of students registered with the DDS have been diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder.

“When I am hyper, I’m the life of the party, everyone is my friend and there isn’t anyone I won’t talk to about anything...”

Mind.org.uk
Symptoms

An individual with Bipolar can experience extreme highs and extremes lows, which affects their mood, energy and ability to function. The period of highs are referred to as periods of “mania” and the lows are referred to as periods of “depression”. A less severe mania is called hypo mania.

During depressive episodes the student may:

- Experience a change in appetite.
- Feel hopeless, guilty, worthless or emotionally empty.
- Become forgetful, have difficulty concentrating and lose interest in everyday life.

During manic episodes the student may:

- Feel euphoric, excessively “high”.
- Feel restless, with high levels of energy.
- Talk quickly, have racing thoughts, or a lack of concentration.
- Engage in risky behaviour, perhaps spending excessively.
- Misuse drugs or behave aggressively.
- Experience psychotic symptoms, such as hallucinations or false beliefs.

Effects on life as a student:

- Poor concentration.
- Restlessness and social withdrawal can make it difficult to attend lectures and seminars.
- Manic episodes may cause the student to lose focus and lack organisational skills.
- Depressive episodes may cause fatigue, lack of interest in everyday life, which can undermine their motivation for study.
- Bizarre behaviour or beliefs during manic episodes can cause isolation from peers.
- Unrealistic beliefs can cause the student to view their abilities differently. During a manic episode the student may have high self-esteem and believe that they don’t need to study, whereas they may have low self-esteem during an episode of depression.
- The side effects of the medication can make mornings difficult and impair concentration.

“When I’m depressed, it’s the absolute worst pain I can experience. I feel like I become a balloon and am just floating outside myself, I cry like a part of me has died.” Mind.org.uk

Tips for support

1. Where appropriate try to provide lecture materials in advance and allow students to record lectures.
2. Avoid putting students “on the spot” when they are experiencing an episode of depression.
3. The symptoms of Bipolar disorder affect each individual differently. Ask the student what academic difficulties they envisage and what coping strategies they use.
4. Try to avoid stressful situations which can trigger relapse.
5. Understand that their unrealistic beliefs whether optimistic or pessimistic may affect the student’s behaviour and performance.
6. If a student is neglecting their studies due to a manic episode, try to gently remind them the consequences of their actions.
7. Students should be aware that alcohol and drugs can exacerbate their symptoms.
8. Encourage the student to live a balanced life. Routine, sleep and nutrition all affect Bipolar disorder.
9. Signpost support within Royal Holloway, encourage the student to seek help.
10. Understand that a student’s bizarre beliefs may isolate them among their peers, avoid drawing attention to these beliefs.