Kate Harkness says we should not fret about the most depressing day of the year.

She says the whole concept of Blue Monday isn't valid.

"It's just a party trick sort of thing," said Harkness, a Queen's University professor of psychology and psychiatry.

"It's like an 'Oh, are you depressed today because it's the most depressing day of the year?' It's more water-cooler discussion."

Blue Monday is the 2005 creation of former Cardiff University lecturer Cliff Arnall. Arnall stated, based on an equation including factors such as the weather, debt and time since quitting New Year's resolutions, the most depressing day of the year falls on a Monday in January.

Although it's disputed whether Blue Monday is the third or fourth Monday of the month, the date is soon to arrive.

Harkness did agree that this time of year does cause many people to be blue, but not for the same reasons as Arnall provided.

"The concept of seasonal affective disorder, or the fact that there are people who get very depressed in the wintertime, that is very valid," she said.

A lack of light in the winter contributes to seasonal depression, said Harkness. Light produces the hormone melatonin, she said, and those with low melatonin levels are more likely to become depressed.

Vicky Huehn, executive director of Frontenac Community Mental Health Services, said even though the phenomenon of Blue Monday isn't valid, it could bring awareness to the illness.

One British website already uses Blue Monday for a greater purpose. Beatbluemonday.org.ukraises money, and awareness, for mental health charities in the United Kingdom.

"We all need to talk about it more often, more openly and not like it's some sort of evil illness, that it's a fact of life for many people, and the depression goes in stages or different levels of intensity," said Huehn.

The organization operates a crisis line for callers who need someone to talk to, said Huehn. Although not every
call seems like a crisis situation, she said the term crisis should be defined by the caller.

"That's one of the issues in our society," she said. "We have to think of things in extremes."

Huehn said it's ridiculous not to talk about depression like we talk about diabetes or other disorders, and maybe recognizing a day as Blue Monday can achieve that.

Harkness cautioned people not to confuse depression in the colloquial sense with clinical depression.

"Major depression is a very serious disorder, and if people do find they get depressed to the point where they have troubles functioning at work, or at school or in their relationships, they should talk to their doctor."

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