The importance of professional and community groups working together to treat personality disorders was raised at a conference held at the University of Wollongong last week.

Professor Brin Grenyer said that schools, doctors and families needed to find ways to collaborate to ensure the mental health of a person.

The University of Wollongong academic co-hosted the fourth annual Treatment of Personality Disorder Conference at the university last week alongside Northfields Clinic director Chris Allan.

This year’s theme was Consolidating Collaboration and Prof Grenyer said the conference provided a unique opportunity for representatives from schools, community, acute and private services to meet with GPs and clinicians.

“It recognises the need to support each other,” Prof Grenyer said. He said the conference aimed to bridge the divide between the different services. “Each service has its own philosophy so we have to try and compare them,” he said. The conference included short presentations on current issues in the field and a networking opportunity for participants.

Prof Grenyer said a highlight had been a presentation by Prof Kay Wilhelm from St Vincent’s Hospital and from Dr Sathyra Rao, clinical director at Spectrum Victoria. Prof Grenyer said it was essential for all services to work together to treat a patient successfully. “Personality disorders are difficult to treat so treatment can take three to four years.

“Clinicians need to take a long term approach and to be well-supported is essential for the patient.” He said awareness of personality disorders was improving but education was key for patients, their families and clinicians. “The progress has been slow and it’s still under the radar,” he said.