



MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION CENTRE OF SOUTH AFRICA

&

MRC UNIT ON ANXIETY & STRESS DISORDERS

INTRODUCTION

In this edition we update you on the research activities of the MRC Anxiety & Stress Disorders Unit, as well as report on the MHIC's activities over the last few months.



Lisa Aitken

Lisa Aitken

Congratulations to Lisa— she is a psychologist at the MRC Unit and are expecting a baby boy. The baby is due early in August!

STAFF AT THE MHIC



Farewell

At the end of April we said goodbye to *Arlene Kleinhans* who has been with the Mental Health Information Centre since April 2007. She headed up the centre since June 2007 as Director of the MHIC.

Arlene Kleinhans We wish her all the best with her future plans.

CONGRATULATIONS



Dylan Fincham

For receiving the faculty's RFEF (Research Fellowship Exchange Fund) fellowship for 2008, to spend a few months at Amsterdam Medical Centre, University of Amsterdam!

Dylan Fincham

Christine Lochner

For receiving a travel award from the Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA) in March, to attend the ADAA Conference in Savannah, Georgia, USA.



Christine Lochner

RESEARCH FOCUS: CAN YOU INHERIT ANXIETY DISORDERS?

The "Genetics of Anxiety Disorders" study aims to identify factors that contribute to the development of anxiety disorders. This study is being conducted at the MRC Unit on Anxiety & Stress Disorders, in collaboration with the MRC/US Centre for Molecular and Cellular Biology. It focuses mainly on the interaction of genetic & environmental factors such as childhood trauma in the development of anxiety disorders, as well as on the question of susceptibility to these conditions after streptococcal infection. Clinicians are asked to consider referring patients with these diagnoses to this project. Participation will not interfere with their treatment. Prof. Christine Lochner will also visit Gauteng from 15 - 22 July and Durban from 23 - 26 July 2008 to do research interviews. She can be contacted on 021-938 9179 or email: cl2@sun.ac.za.

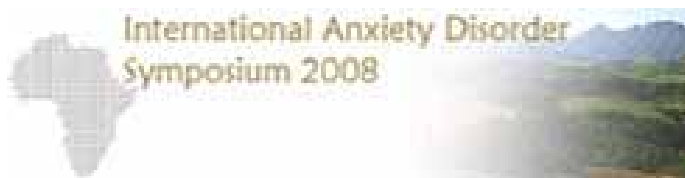
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On the 17th and 18th of March the International Anxiety Disorders Symposium took place at the Westin Grand Cape Town Arabella Quays in Cape Town.

The conference was a great success with international speakers like Alan Stein, Peter Cooper, Hans-Ulrich Wittchen, Marc Schuckit, Borwin Bandelow, Naomi Fineberg, Damiaan Denys, David Baldwin, Herman Westenberg, Joseph Zohar, David Nutt, Christer Allgulander, David Castle, Jack van Honk, Pim Cuijpers, Catherine Mancini and Michael van Ameringen.

The winners of the poster presentations were Dr Bavinisha Vythilingum with a poster titled '*Association between uterine artery pulsatility index and antenatal maternal psychological stress*' and Jonathan Ipser with his poster titled '*Online information portal for evidence-based research on anxiety and trauma-related disorders*'.

The Mental Health Information Centre gratefully acknowledges the following donors for their generous contributions: Adcock Ingram, AstraZeneca, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Eli-Lilly, GlaxoSmithKline, Life Path Health Group, Lundbeck, Pfizer Laboratories, Pharma Dynamics, Sandoz, Servier Laboratories and Wyeth.

BRAIN AWARENESS WEEK, MARCH 2008

Two schools from the surrounding areas were invited to the MRC for an educational day on the 11th and 13th of March.



Excelsior Senior Secondary and Ravensmead Senior Secondary school students were first guided through the Medical museum by Prof. Ben Page. Afterwards they took part in several exciting and mind-bending brain teasers, organized by Lisa Aitken.

They also watched an educational video warning them of the dangers of Methamphetamine (TIK) to the brain. After the video, the students had a brief demonstration and lecture on functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) by Dr Bruce Spottiswoode.

Last, but not least, they took part in a Quiz with some amazing prizes were won (Thanks to our sponsors, Kfm, GoodHope Fm, SANCA, Die Burger, Pick n Pay, Wimpy Parow Centre, Vodacom, Fedex, Tygervalley Centre, Novartis, Pfizer, Cadbury, Frankor Bakery and Parow Centre Management).



GENETICS OF OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE AND OTHER ANXIETY DISORDERS

The MRC Unit on Anxiety and Stress Disorders, in collaboration with the Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Stellenbosch, has launched an extensive project a number of years ago to identify the possible causes that could contribute to the development of anxiety disorders such as panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), social anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and trichotillomania.

This research project requires the participation of people (children and adults) who suspect that they may suffer from any of these disorders, or who have been diagnosed with these previously. In this way people will get the opportunity to be part of an important research project on anxiety disorder free of charge, and they will have access to the results of the study.

If participants are interested in treatment, referrals to appropriate clinicians will be made. We now have approximately 450 OCD, 100 TTM, 100 PD and 115 SAD patients, and 1300 controls on our database—indeed a great achievement! If you suspect or know that you suffer from an anxiety disorder such as OCD, and you are interested in participating in this project, kindly contact Prof. Christine Lochner for a confidential screening test. Tel: (021)938 9179; e-pos: cl2@sun.ac.za

BRAIN IMAGING STUDY OF OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)

The study specifically aims to investigate the effects of a chemical agent (escitalopram) on a person's thinking patterns and emotional responses, as determined by functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), and also to find out more about the role of specific polymorphisms in certain candidate genes (i.e. the heritable material), in the variance noted in the brain imaging (fMRI) findings.

Participation involves attendance of 3 sessions, with the first session comprising of a diagnostic interview, filling in self-report questionnaires and drawing of blood for genetic analysis. During the subsequent two sessions a brain scan, with the once-off administration of a pharmacological agent (active ingredient/placebo on the alternative day) beforehand, is done.

In addition, whilst in the scanner in sessions 2 and 3, participants complete a number of neuropsychological tasks in the form of computerized games. Afterwards, the participant can take a break and then returns to the MRC Unit on Anxiety & Stress Disorders to complete a few simple behavioural (also computerized) tasks. All procedures are carefully explained by the investigators and are all processes monitored throughout.

Three "types" of volunteers are needed for participation: 1) Right handed persons (aged between 18 and 65 years) diagnosed with OCD, who are not currently using psychiatric medication, or who are willing to stop taking such medication for the duration of their participation - more or less 4 weeks;

2) healthy first-degree relatives (aged between 18 and 65 years) of such OCD participants; and
3) healthy, right handed persons (aged between 18 and 65 years) without a psychiatric disorder.

We have now screened 15 controls, 13 patients with OCD, and 5 patients with trichotillomania and have some of these already been scanned at CUBIC. If you are interested in participation, either as a healthy control or OCD patient, and want to contribute to this study, please contact Prof. Christine Lochner (Tel: 021 - 938 9179, e-mail: cl2@sun.ac.za) or Ms Jemona Mostert (Tel: 021 - 938 9762, e-mail: jmostert@sun.ac.za) for more information.

FUNCTIONAL IMPAIRMENTS OF SOUTH AFRICAN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)

This is the first research study to examine the functional impairments of South African children with OCD. There is a paucity of literature on the functional impairments of children and adolescents with OCD. Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that the impairment caused by OCD is significant in a number of domains, and that OCD-related functional impairment in childhood/adolescence may differ across cultures. Thus, there is a need to conduct a study of this sort in South Africa, as this will inform the future diagnosis and treatment of South African children and adolescents with OCD.

The study requires the participation of children/adolescents who have been diagnosed with OCD together with their parent/s. The study involves two interviews and the completion of a questionnaire. Participants will be compensated for travel costs. All information gathered during the study will be treated as confidential.

If you would like to participate in the study or to find out more about it, please contact Prof. Christine Lochner (Tel: 021 - 938 9179, e-mail: cl2@sun.ac.za) of the MRC Unit on anxiety and Stress Disorders, University of Stellenbosch, or her co-researchers in the UCT Department of Psychology: Dr. Kevin Thomas (021 - 650 4608, email: kevin.thomas@uct.ac.za) or Ms Lara Hoppe (larahoppe@gmail.com).

MRC Awards Received in 2008:

Prof. Dan Stein was recently given an A rating by the NRF. There are only 29 scholars at UCT who have been bestowed this honour. We trust that this recognition of his work will further assist Dan in forging collaborative and inter-institutional research projects in the future.

Prof. Soraya Seedat has been awarded a NRF Chair in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. This is an exceptionally prestigious award, and we are very proud of her.

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REFERENCES:
1. Yonkers KL, et al. Clin Ther. 2007; 29 (11): 2219-32
2. Phase IIIa for OCD and www.cipla.com on 5 May 2008.

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We at the MHIC & the MRC Unit on Anxiety & Stress Disorders would like to thank everyone for their contributions to this newsletter. We hope that the rest of 2008 will be an even bigger success!!

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