

NEWS UPDATE

Focus on Research

July 2004



MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION CENTRE OF SOUTH AFRICA

The MHIC is currently preparing for a new congress aimed specifically at primary healthcare practitioners, to be held at Spier Wine Estate, Stellenbosch, in October. In addition, this newsletter focuses on research and the MRC Unit for Anxiety and Stress Disorders. The researchers in our team have been hard at work on several research projects. We report here on a few of these projects and recent findings. For further information on any of these projects, please feel free to give us a call at (021) 938 9229 or to contact the researchers directly.

on the new Mental Health Care Act, Dr Simon Kesler on migraines and much, much more. Check our website (www.mentalhealthsa.co.za) for more info on this, or call our offices at tel. (021) 938 9229. This is one educational highlight you do not want to miss!



The Spier Wine Estate in Stellenbosch: venue for our Psychiatry for General Practice Congress – see you there!

New!! GP CONGRESS AT SPIER



RESEARCH



The MHIC, in collaboration with the *Department of Family Medicine and Primary Care* at the University of Stellenbosch, will be hosting a psychiatry congress for general practitioners. The **2004 Psychiatry for General Practice Congress** will take place on **16 to 17 October at Spier** Wine Estate, Stellenbosch. We have an exciting line-up of expert local speakers, and the programme includes an afternoon of workshops and hands-on training. Full CPD accreditation will be applied for, including ethics sessions. Confirmed presentations include Prof Robin Emmsley on the novel antipsychotics; Prof Dan Stein on future antidepressants; Prof Piet Oosthuizen on advances in managing bipolar mood disorder, Dr Jane Saunders on HIV/AIDS and mental health; Prof Tuvia Zabow

The main objective of the **Genetics of Anxiety Disorders research project** is to identify those factors that contribute to the development of anxiety disorders in the South African population. Among others, we focus on the interaction between environmental factors (e.g. trauma, head injury, streptococcal infections) and genetic factors. A large number of participants are needed to do this type of research – therefore recruitment of patients remains an integral part of the work. The Afrikaner family tree investigations have shown that there is no single ancestor carrying the OCD-gene, but rather that groups of patients can be linked to specific ancestors. These findings may indicate that multiple genes

MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION CENTRE

MHIC Newsletter

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RESEARCH CONTINUED

work together to mediate susceptibility to OCD.



Christine Lochner, project leader of the OCD genetics study.

Recent findings by Sian Hemmings and others in the **OCD genetics research** group include data suggesting involvement of a gene, called *DAT*, in OCD. Consistent with previous hypotheses, it has also been found that it is the dopaminergic system in particular that is relevant in the mediation of early onset OCD. Another study by Sian has investigated the role of candidate genes in the dopaminergic and serotonergic circuits in the development of trichotillomania. Christine Lochner has done some of the first work looking at how OCD-spectrum disorders cluster together; she has suggested that there are three different kinds of OCD spectrum disorders in OCD, each with unique features.

The **Bathuthuzele Youth Stress Clinic** provides free screening, assessments, medication, and psychotherapy referrals to youth between the ages of 8 and 18 years who have been exposed to trauma. A study comparing the neuropsychological functioning and brain volumes of adolescents with and without post-traumatic stress disorder is taking place within the clinic.



Prof Soraya Seedat, co-director of the MRC Unit and head of the PTSD research group.

A **Rape Prophylaxis Study** has recently been initiated at the Karl Bremer Rape Clinic. This study will be extended to other rape centres to increase recruitment rates. The aim is to recruit 120 women 18 years and older to determine the efficacy and tolerability of different medications

compared with placebo in the prophylaxis of posttraumatic stress disorder in survivors of trauma up to 1-year post assault/injury.

A study comparing the effectiveness of early **cognitive behavioural group therapy** and repeated clinical assessments in adolescent rape survivors is soon to start. Recruitment will take place at the Karl Bremer Rape Centre and we aim to compare the effectiveness of an early trauma-focused group CBT intervention with repeated clinical assessments in reducing PTSD and depressive symptoms.



Dr Jacqueline Muller of the Somatoform study.

A **Somatoform Study** in Primary Care has been launched. Somatization disorders, characterised by multiple medically unexplained physical symptoms associated with psychological distress and health-seeking behaviour, are present in at least 10-15 % of primary care patients. Not only are somatoform disorders associated with substantial impairment in quality of life, but excessive clinic visits, diagnostic testing, prescriptions, referrals to specialists and surgical procedures also amount to escalating health care costs. However, little is known of the pathophysiology and treatment of somatoform disorders. Dr's Jacqueline Muller and Ig Wentzel are studying aspects of the neurobiology and pharmacotherapy of multi-somatoform disorder in primary care. For more information, please contact them at (021) 938 9189 or call the MHIC Call Centre.

Our **HIV and Mental Health Study** aims to examine psychological variables that may impact on mental health, and to standardise three brief rating-scales to measure Depression, Alcohol Abuse and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in HIV-positive patients who attend primary health care clinics in the Western Cape. Clinic sites include Tygerberg Hospital's Infectious Diseases Unit, the Bird Street clinic in Stellenbosch, and Paarl Hospital. Staff at these clinics have been most helpful and enthusiastic about the study. The study's budgetary constraints have required some creative strategising in order to meet with intended goals, which include 600

RESEARCH CONTINUED

participants by the end of the year. Pick 'n Pay generously donated vouchers which will go towards assisting with the costs of remunerating participants. Well done Neil and thank you Pick 'n Pay!



The South African Aids Vaccine Initiative (SAAVI) recently approved our **SAAVI HIV Vaccine Research Project**. This study, in collaboration with Dr Linda Gail-Bekker and colleagues, aims to examine the social and behavioural issues related to phase III HIV vaccine trials. Masiphumelele, a peri-urban, informal settlement in the Southern Cape Peninsula, will be the study site. It falls part of a larger consortium including a range of scientists concerned with all aspects of vaccine trials. Our Unit is involved in two projects: a baseline HIV-related knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) household survey, and an investigation looking at risk behaviour and examining in greater detail perceptions about HIV vaccine trials and willingness to participate in these trials.

AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

National Anxiety Disorders Awareness Week (04 to 10 October) and **World Mental Health Day** (10 October) are just around the corner. The MHIC will be working closely with the media to disseminate recent and accurate information to the public during this time. We will also be distributing brochures nationally via our established networks in the health care sector. Do not forget the **National Mental Health Media Awards**, which will take place on 07 October at the V & A Waterfront, Cape Town. Our national panel have been hard at work scanning and reviewing the work of journalists to submit nominations. Note: we have opened the Awards to accommodate **self-nominations** for the first time this year, in response to requests by the media fraternity. To all those on the panel, please remember that nominations need to reach our offices by 19 July 2004.

Follow-up of our **Brain Awareness Week** campaign is that Prof Willie Daniels will once again give feedback to the European Dana Alliance for the Brain on our activities at the EDAB Brain Awareness Week Reception during the FENS 2004 Conference in Lisbon, Portugal, on 12 July.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

- **Professional education:** Consultants from the Department of Psychiatry, University of Stellenbosch, presented on a variety of topics at CPD lectures to Department of Health staff. Topics included Dementia, Exposure to Trauma and Child Sexual Abuse.
- **Academic presentations:** Winnie de Roover presented her Substance Abuse and Trauma Among Women in Treatment findings at the SA Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU) regional meeting.
- **Nursing students:** In addition to the University of Stellenbosch undergraduate and post basic students that we have trained at our Call Centre for the past few years, we will also be accommodating masters level students from the University of the Western Cape. The first group of UWC students rotate through our Centre early September. We look forward to collaborating with UWC and assisting in the training of their postgraduate nursing students.
- **Lay presentations:** Together with the staff from various departments at our Health Sciences Faculty, University of Stellenbosch, we presented to lay audiences at Old Mutual head office on Smoking Cessation, Alcohol and Drug Abuse. Occupational therapist Liesel Hennessy of the Panorama Memory Clinic presented on Alzheimer's disease to the Association for Retired Persons and Pensioners (ARPP). Charmaine Hugo spoke to a group of family members and caregiver's at Cape Support for Mental Health (CSMH) on How Businesses in SA View Mental Illness, and Sharain Suliman addressed a group at the Kasselsvlei Community Centre on PTSD and the Bathuthuzele Youth Stress Clinic.



Dr Felix Potocnik talking on Dementia to Dept of Health staff at a recent monthly CPD lecture.

STAFF NEWS

Staff members of the MRC Unit for Anxiety and Stress Disorders have really been doing it for themselves! A **warm welcome** to Neil Micklewood (Research Assistant with the HIV and Mental Health Study), Jonathan Ipser (Cochrane reviews), Sirraaj Parker (Research Assistant with the Bathuthuzele Clinic and the TOP Study), and Nokuzola Tshume (Interviewer for the HIV and Mental Health Study).

Congratulations to Prof Soraya Seedat, who has been promoted to *Associate Professor* at the Dept of Psychiatry, and Prof Willie Daniels, who has been elected *President of the Society of Neuroscientists of Africa (SONA)*. Willie, co-director of the animal model group, has been very involved with our BAW campaigns, travelling all over the Western Cape to present at schools on the effects of substance abuse on the brain.

Our very own wall of fame: Dr Hanlie Moolman-Smook, who supervises the laboratory aspects of the genetics studies, received the National Research Foundation (NRF) *President's Award* – this is the highest accolade for outstanding researchers under 35 years of age.



Dr Hanlie Moolman-Smook, recently presented with the NRF President's Award.

Christine Lochner and Dr Jacqueline Muller were both presented with Collegium Internationale Neuro-Psychopharmacologicum (CINP) *Young Investigator Awards*, which they received at the 2004 CINP conference held in Paris, France. Christine also received the Lundbeck International Neuroscience Foundation (LINF) *Sponsorship Award for 2004* in recognition of

her research work, and has been invited to participate in one of their seminars in Denmark.

Prof Dan Stein, together with Prof Willie Pienaar of the Dept of Psychiatry at the University of Stellenbosch, was recently presented with a *Fellowship by Peer Review* from the SA College of Psychiatrists.



Prof Dan Stein, director of the MRC Unit for Anxiety & Stress Disorders.

Dr Jacqueline Muller has been awarded a *MRC Research Fellowship*. Dr Paul Carey of the brain imaging and PTSD groups has received a University of Stellenbosch *Higher-Level Term research grant*. Joachim Uys of the animal models group received a *MRC Travel Award* to visit the Wellcome Sanger Institute in Cambridge, UK.



Joachim Uys (Left) and Dr Paul Carey (Right)

Wedding bells and baby rattles: And lastly, but no less important, congratulations to Renee de Wit, clinical psychologist with the PTSD group who is now 'Mom' to a little baby girl, and Lelanie Richter of the animal models group who is now 'Mrs Marais'.

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