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## MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION CENTRE OF SOUTH AFRICA

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the third edition of the 2005 MHIC Newsletter! We hope you will enjoy reading about our activities of the past months and National Anxiety Disorders Awareness Week. We have also included a special feature on the 10<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Mental Health Information Centre.

### CONSUMER HEALTH DAYS

On August 11<sup>th</sup>, the Mental Health Information Centre participated once more in the *ABSA Employee Health Wellness Day*, where we had the chance to make the ABSA employees aware of our services, give valuable handouts, create awareness about mental health problems and address the stigma associated with mental illness.

On August 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> the MHIC staff manned an exhibition stall at the *49th Annual Academic Day of the Faculty of Health Sciences*, University of Stellenbosch. This forum for innovative research hosts various parallel sessions, a selection of state-of-the-art lectures presented by experts from various interest

groups, followed by a combined session of the winning papers that usually draws a diverse audience. The exhibition stand enabled us to inform students, lecturers, GPs, psychiatrists, people from the industry and interested visitors about our call centre and other MHIC services.



*MHIC table at Academic Year Day 2005*

The MHIC also contributed to the exhibition at Neuroclinic C during *Stikland Opedag*, October 7<sup>th</sup>. The main purpose of the Open Day is to get information about mental health/ illness out to the public, to open the doors of Stikland, to shed light on the unknown and in this way address the stigma surrounding mental health hospitals and mental illness. Speakers at the Open Day were Bruce Walsh, Dr Bongo Chiliza and former patient, Werner van der Merwe.

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# NATIONAL ANXIETY DISORDERS AWARENESS WEEK

## 10-16 OCTOBER 2005

Since 1997 the MHIC has been celebrating World Mental Health Day (WMHD), 10 October, by focusing on the anxiety disorders in the week surrounding this international event. This year the WMHD theme was 'Mental and Physical Health across the Life Span'. As usual our National Anxiety Disorders Awareness Campaign was launched by a strong **media drive**. A number of press releases was sent out and resulted in several radio interviews, a television interview on SABC Africa, and numerous newspaper articles. Our call centre was at hand to answer requests for information from people all over South Africa and make appropriate referrals.

We hosted 2 **Continued Professional Development** (CPD) sessions for psychiatrists and neurologists in collaboration with Aspen Pharmacare. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of October Prof. Soraya Seedat had a round table discussion on "PTSD: Current and Future Drug Treatments" at the Oude Welgemoed. On October 18<sup>th</sup>, Dr Paul Carey presented on "New Developments in the Treatment of Anxiety Disorders" at the Two Oceans Aquarium. Both events were of high standard and well received by the attendants.

On Thursday 13 October we hosted our annual **Mental Health Media Awards** at the Two Oceans Aquarium, Cape Town. A panel representing academic, research, treatment, support, advocacy, government and non-government mental health organisations from across South Africa nominated and voted for journalists who had played a significant role in informing the public about mental health and illness in the past year. These awards are a token of national recognition for accurate, sensitive and responsible reporting on mental health matters. The national panel cast their votes for winners in 3 categories: Newspaper, Magazine and Radio/Internet/ Television as well as for an overall winner. Winners of the 2005 Mental Health Media Awards were Jillian Green (The Star) for the Newspaper category, SJ du Toit (article in You/ Huisgenoot) for the Magazine category, and Ilse Pauw (Health 24) for the Radio/ Television/ Internet category. Ilse Pauw was also voted overall winner for 2005. Certificates of Special Recognition were awarded to Karen Rutter (Fair Lady) for creating awareness about violence against women and to Fanie du Toit (Radio Sonder

Grense) for his efforts to raise awareness about the difficulties and successes of people with a disability. Nominees, consumer advocacy and support groups, academics as well as our sponsors attended this event, making it an interesting evening.

At the same event we commemorated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mental Health Information Centre, therewith adding on to the festivity. This was once more a wonderful event with positive feedback from the attendees.



### Media Awards winners

From left to right: Winnie De Roover (MHIC); Ilse Pauw (Health 24); Liezel de Villiers (MHIC); SJ du Toit (You/ Huisgenoot); Fanie du Toit (Radio Sonder Grense); Jillian Green (The Star); Karen Rutter (Fair Lady); Annerine Roos (MHIC)

## PUBLICATIONS UPDATE:

The updated versions of the 'Textbook of Psychiatry' and 'Handboek vir Psigiatrie', as well as 'Psychiatric Medications in Primary Care: Algorithms and Guidelines' are currently available from our office.

We have nearly completed the huge task of updating all the entries in our 'Mental Health Resource Guide of Southern Africa 2006' and hope to have this publication available by the end of the year. We are pleased to announce that for this year's edition we collaborated with the SA Federation for Mental Health in order to extend our entries in the categories accommodation, special schools, protective workplaces etc. This will increase the value of our Resource Guide even more and strengthened our ties with the SAFMH.

We have been working simultaneously on the *electronic version of the Resource Guide* that will be loaded on our website later this year. This will increase the accessibility for professionals and lay people of mental health resources in their area.



Mental health is as important as physical health to the overall well-being of individuals, societies and countries. Yet only a small percentage of the people suffering from a mental disorder receive treatment, which adds to the personal, social and economic burden of mental illness. Barriers to treatment comprise a lack of resources, including information, as well as social stigma.

In 1995 an innovative approach, making mental health information available to the public using telephonic and web support, was developed by the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Stellenbosch to address the need for psycho-education and facilitate early diagnosis and treatment.

This fairly unique initiative was called the **Mental Health Information Centre of South Africa**, and has been operating for 10 years now. Apart from providing numerous lay and professional people with electronic, telephonic, or faxed mental health information and appropriate referrals, we have been involved with several activities to increase awareness on mental health and combat stigma.



**MHIC group in 2003**

*From left to right: Front row: Jane Metelo-Liquito, Sharain Suliman, Mpumi*

*Middle row: Michelle Brand, Charmaine Hugo*

*Back row: Johnny Daniels, Jenny Roos (BIG), Annerine Roos*

### ***Some MHIC highlights over the past 10 years:***

In 1997 the MHIC received formal recognition from the **Medical Research Council (MRC)** as a core project of the MRC Research Unit on Anxiety and Stress Disorders therewith emphasising our commitment to facilitate research and bring research knowledge to the larger public.

The MHIC **publications** are updated regularly and include the Mental Health Resource Guide of Southern Africa (since 1996); Psychiatric Medications In Primary Care: Algorithms and Guidelines (since 1998); both an English and an Afrikaans Textbook for Psychiatry (2002, 2005); False Alarm, a patient guide on the anxiety disorders (since 1999); as well as 8 brochures for lay people on the anxiety disorders and related conditions.

Our public **awareness and education** efforts covered various mental health topics and made use of diverse channels to reach a broad audience: Brain Awareness Week (with displays in public libraries, main shopping malls etc), Anxiety Disorders Awareness Week (with several National Screening Days, the first National Mental Health Film Festival in 2001 etc), Substance Abuse Awareness Week, Schizophrenia Day and Alzheimers Day. In 1996 we participated in the first South-African television series on mental disorders (**'Improve your frame of mind'**). These 10 programmes were devoted to a range of psychiatric conditions. Patients spoke about their illness and professional input was given. The series was broadcasted over 2 SABC channels and re-run on Channel 2.

We have co-ordinated and participated in numerous **professional education** events such as continuing professional development (CPD) activities, conferences, workshops, and seminars on a broad range of mental health topics.

The MHIC has been **awarded** a number of times for its contribution to increasing mental health awareness. For example, in 1999 the MHIC received the **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder initiative (OCDi) award**

## SOME MHIC HIGHLIGHTS OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS

in recognition of our work in patient support, public and professional education, and innovations in diagnosis and clinical management of OCD. We have also received the **Advertising Association Award** in 1999 for a radio advertisement that was broadcasted during the annual national anxiety awareness campaign. In June 2002 the MHIC received the "**Organization of the month**" award by the online journal **Science in Africa**, in recognition of the work done for Brain Awareness Week.

And finally, the MHIC has been recognized by international role players such as the European Dana Alliance for the Brain (EDAB), World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH), World Health Organisation (WHO), and Global Alliance for Mental Illness Advocacy Networks (GAMIAN).



### **OCDi Award**

*Fltr: Front row: Dr. Soraya Seedat, Prof. Robin Emsley, Prof. Dan Stein, Charmaine Wessels, Janine van Kradenburg.  
Back row: Dr. Franz Korb*

## WAY FORWARD

With this decade of internationally and nationally recognized contributions to mental health promotion, the MHIC will strive to adjust to the changing mental health environment and continue to provide a professional service with regards to mental health queries. Due to the limited resources for mental health in South Africa, collaboration with, and mutual support of local and international mental health stakeholders remains crucial. The MHIC website ([www.mentalhealthsa.co.za](http://www.mentalhealthsa.co.za)) will also continue to be an invaluable tool for disseminating information to a wider audience and is therefore continuously updated. Given the fact that more people are becoming computer literate, we will further expand these electronic resources to reach more people efficiently. The MHIC will continue to support and encourage research and publicize research findings in the popular media in order to increase awareness, educate, and fight stigma associated with mental illness.



### **MHIC staff 2004**

*Fltr: Annerine Roos, Winnie De Roover, Liezel de Villiers, Johnny Daniels*

## MRC NEWS: FAREWELL

In the past months we said farewell to two dear colleagues:

Dr. Ignatius Wentzel, who worked together with Dr. Jacqueline Muller, was mainly involved with recruitment for the somatoform study. Ig resigned upon completion of the study to go back to more clinical work.



*Dr. Ig Wentzel*

Sharain Suliman, who was research assistant to Prof. Soraya Seedat and had a special interest in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, left the Unit to pursue a career in psychometrics. Sharain was involved in a number of projects such as the Termination of Pregnancy study, the Rape trauma prophylaxis study, Rape CBT study and managed the Bathuthuzele Youth Stress Clinic.



*Sharain Suliman*

## MRC NEWS: WELCOME

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Nuraan Fakier is a UCT research psychology masters student. She is currently working on Cochrane reviews, and has also just completed a survey on the profile of rape victims presenting to Karl Bremer hospital. Nuraan will be formally taking over Sharain's management of Bathuthuzele Youth Stress Clinic in January.

Rachel Bell - a research elective pre-medical student from Vancouver, Canada- will be conducting a study (following on from Femke Vink) of trauma-related assumptions in HIV positive adults with PTSD from October 2005 till January 2006.

Faranaaz Parker, a UWC research psychology masters student, will be joining the MRC Unit on Anxiety Disorders as part-time research assistant on 1 November 2005 and will be completing her internship at the unit from January till December 2006. She will be involved in various projects, including the acute stress disorder studies and Dr. Paul Carey's HIV studies.

Fairuz Gaibie, a UCT research psychology masters student, will be starting the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2005 as research assistant until the end of 2006. Fairuz will also be involved in various projects, including the acute stress disorder studies and Dr. Paul Carey's HIV studies.

Nina Erfert, a PhD student from Germany, will be joining us on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November for 6 months. She will assist Christine Lochner with administering computerized neuropsychological tasks for the Social Anxiety Disorders genetics study.

Sheila Faure, a clinical psychologist, does assessments for stress in Dr. Bavi Vythilingum's pregnancy project. Sheila will also do her PhD through the MRC Unit on Anxiety Disorders.

Frances Robertson, engineer, will be helping with the data analysis for the NIRS studies (Near Infrared Spectroscopy).

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## MHIC



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