



MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION CENTRE OF SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

We are more than half-way through the year and there is much that has been going at the Mental Health Information Centre. Due to a number of staff changes Newsletter 2 did not go out in time, therefore we have decided to combine it with Newsletter 3. In this edition we focus on keeping you updated on the research activities of the MRC Anxiety & Stress Disorders Unit, as well as report on our activities over the last few months and our recent staff changes.

Sharain Suliman joined us in August to take over from Kerrin. Sharain previously worked at the MHIC and was involved in several studies dealing with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder at the MRC Unit on Anxiety and Stress Disorders. She has training in Psychological Research and gained further experience in the field while working for a psychometric assessment bureau. Her interest and experience in the field of mental health have helped to ensure a smooth transition, and we are glad to welcome her on board.

NEW STAFF AT THE MHIC

End of March we said our goodbyes to Johnny Daniels who had been the MHIC administrative officer for the past 2 years. Shortly after that we welcomed Allen Liwani as our new MHIC admin officer. Allen works with us in the afternoons and is responsible for our finances and website, assists in the MHIC call-centre and with our publications. She also assists Dr Christine Lochner with data-capturing and administrative tasks in the morning. In this short period we have grown to appreciate Allen's friendly and hardworking nature.



Picture 1: Sharain and Allen at the MHIC

Kerrin Lewey, who was the MHIC Office Manager, resigned in June to pursue a career in trauma counselling. In her time here Kerrin ensured the smooth running of the MHIC and we were sad to say goodbye to her.

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PSYCHOEDUCATION AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Apart from spreading information and pamphlets to a lay audience, professionals and organisations on a daily basis the Mental Health Information Centre also has regular info sessions for those organisations who wish to learn more about our services. In June the MHIC received a team of 8 social workers from the City of Cape Town Emergency Services to whom we presented a slide show on the MHIC and stigma.

On 25 May the MHIC hosted a Continued Medical Education session in collaboration with Aspen Pharmacare. This event took place at the BMW Pavilion at the Waterfront in Cape Town and Dr James Butler, a neurologist at Constantiaberg Mediclinic, presented on Epilepsy: Current Treatment Options. The talk was well received by the mixed audience of GP's, paediatricians and psychiatrists

EXHIBITIONS

One of the MHIC's goals is to increase awareness on mental health issues and combat the stigma associated with mental disorders. Therefore we continue to represent and man an exhibition table at a number of different forums. On June 17th the MHIC was invited to the MRC Youth Day where we disseminated information to adolescents from various schools in the Western Cape.

On 16 & 17 August the MHIC staff manned an exhibition table at The Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Stellenbosch annual Academic Year Day. At this forum for innovative research, where experts in various fields presented state-of-the-art lectures, we were able to inform students, lecturers, GP's Psychiatrists, and any other interested parties about our services.



Picture 2: MHIC table at the MRC

MRC ANXIETY AND STRESS DISORDERS UNIT - RESEARCH UPDATE

Prof Dan Stein's vision of developing an internationally recognized Centre of Excellence in Brain-Behaviour Studies is on its way to being realized, with the NRF having provisionally accepted a Brain-Behaviour Initiative as a Research Niche Area (RNA). The initial focus of this RNA will be on vulnerability and resilience after trauma. Congratulations Prof Stein!

As in previous years, the unit has several core groups, The Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Unit, The Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Unit, and the Genetics, Brain Imaging and Animal Models Units.

Prof Soraya Seedat, Director of the Posttraumatic Stress Disorders Unit, continues to provide a free screening, assessment and referral service to youth who have been exposed to trauma, through the Bathuthuzele Youth Stress Clinic. She is involved in a number of other studies, including an investigation into the possible effects of stress in people contracting tuberculosis. This study, which was initiated earlier in the year, is being done in conjunction with the TB Unit at Tygerberg Hospital. A study on the impact of maternal stress and trauma and infant neurodevelopment in HIV-infected infants is currently ongoing. Research assistants, Liezel le Roux (née de Villiers), Fatima Parker and Roxanne Martinussen assist Prof Seedat with her numerous studies.

Earlier this year, Prof Seedat, together with Dr Keith Ganasen, the unit's medical officer, launched a prospective follow-up study of posttraumatic stress symptoms in mortuary workers. Dr Ganasen is also working with Dr Paul Carey, on a PTSD/Olanzapine trial and a treatment trial of depressed people, who are on AntiRetroViral's, with Escitalopram. Dr Carey is Co-Director of the Brain Imaging Programme and has been involved in the imaging of individuals with anxiety and substance use disorders, in many of the unit's studies.

MRC ANXIETY AND STRESS DISORDERS UNIT - RESEARCH UPDATE CONTINUED



Picture 3: Prof Stein



Picture 4: Prof Soraya Seedat

Dr Christine Lochner, has once again been touring the country to recruit participants for the Genetics of Anxiety Disorders Program, of which she is Co-Director. She recently presented a workshop in Pretoria, for 4 clinicians (psychologists in private practice) to join the project. They will help her with recruitment and interviewing. She has also obtained the help of two private clinicians in the Cape Town area to do the same. Collaboration between the Unit, and clinicians at Groote Schuur and Lenteguur (to recruit and interview - and increase the numbers) is also underway.

Dr Bavi Vythilingum is a post-doctoral fellow with interests in genetic and environmental contributions to early anxiety. She is looking at the interaction of psychological, physiological, neural and environmental factors related to anxiety and stress in pregnancy, and outcomes on the infant. Annerine Roos and Sister Robyn Kalan are working with her on this project. Annerine is also doing her PhD in the area and is the unit's Near Infrared Spectroscopy (NIRS) Technician.



Picture 5: Dr Paul Carey



Picture 6: Dr Christine



Picture 7: Dr Bavi Vythilingum

MRC ANXIETY AND STRESS DISORDERS UNIT – RESEARCH UPDATE CONTINUED

Ilse Jordaan is a clinical psychologist who assists with the neuropsychological assessments for various studies e.g. the adolescent PTSD imaging study and the Sydenham's Chorea studies.

Another key person is Helena Smit, the Unit's administrator who ensures the smooth running of the unit.

CONGRATULATIONS !!!

On 10 May 2006 Prof Dan Stein was inaugurated as chair of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Cape Town. A wide variety of people filled the auditorium to listen to Prof Stein's inaugural lecture.

Congratulations go out to Jonathan Ipser and Keith Ganasen: Jonathan, Prof Stein and Prof Seedat were awarded the Kenneth Warren Prize for best Cochrane review from a developing nation over the previous year. The topic was Pharmacotherapy for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD.) Keith was the only South African, among 30 other Africans, selected to attend the (all-expenses paid) IBRO/Fogarty Neuroscience School focusing on HIV/AIDS in Kinshasa (1-5 September). Well done to them both!



Picture 8: Jonathan Ipser



Picture 9: Dr Keith Ganasen

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Congratulations also go out to Bavi, on the birth of her new son, Avindrha, and Winnie on the adoption of her baby boy, Arno Jabulani!



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