



MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION CENTRE OF SOUTH AFRICA

The Year in Review at the Mental Health Information Centre

INTRODUCTION

As 2006 is drawing towards a close it is once again time to reflect at the past year, our activities and achievements, and to look forward to the New Year and our future plans. Due to various staff changes and unexpected events, the Mental Health Information Centre ran at a slightly slower pace than usual during the 11th year of its existence. However, we are pleased to report back on the following activities:

PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

International Anxiety Disorders Conference

On 24-26 February, the MHIC and MRC Research unit on Anxiety Disorders hosted the International Anxiety Disorders Conference at Spier Wine Estate, Stellenbosch.



Twenty expert speakers (mainly international) updated a modest audience of 160 local and international psychiatrists on the most recent advances in the field of the anxiety disorders.

Relevant questions regarding clinical practise and contested topics in research were addressed and debated. The stunning venue, wonderful food and stimulating talks and discussions contributed to this conference being a big success.

We would like to accord a special word of thanks to our exhibitors and the participating companies, without whose support this would not have been possible.

South African- Korean Anxiety workshop

The MHIC organised a half-day workshop on anxiety disorders on the 23rd of February. Participants included a group of 10 Korean psychiatrists, MRC Unit on Anxiety Disorders staff, interested local psychiatrists and medical students. During this series of lectures, research findings from Korea and South Africa were presented to and discussed with the audience.

CME session

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 neurologist Dr James Butler (Constantia-berg Mediclinic), presented on 'Current treatment options for epilepsy'. The talk was well received by the mixed audience of GP's, paediatricians and psychiatrists.

The MHIC also has regular info sessions for those organisations who wish to learn more about our services. On June 6th the Mental Health Information Centre received a team of 8 social workers from the City of Cape Town Emergency Services. We presented a slide show on the MHIC and stigma.

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NEWSLETTER
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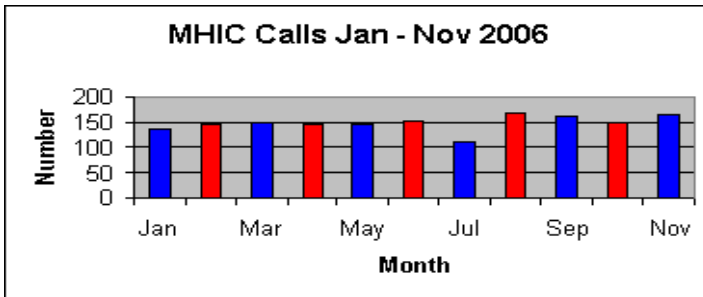
INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

The MHIC call centre continues to serve as a training ground for nursing students. 64 final year students and 7 post-basic nursing diploma students rotated through the call centre this year as part of their curriculum in community psychiatry and information dissemination.

In 2006 the call centre answered various nationwide queries for information on mental health or referrals. As we are based in Cape Town and most of activities were local this year, the bulk of our calls originated from the Western Cape Province (2/3). One out of five callers was from Gauteng and the remaining from KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape etc.

In 2006, we once more encouraged accurate and responsible reporting with regards to mental health topics and took pleasure in assisting journalists in compiling articles. This resulted in over 20 magazine articles, more than 15 radio interviews, and various newspaper and internet articles. Over the years we have established sound contacts with most journalists who report on mental health issues and we are pleased to often be contacted as first port of entry when they are looking for the most recent scientific information or the expert to speak to for their article or show.

Another exciting project was working together with Claire de Klerk, a media student at Tshwane University of Technology, towards a Public Service Announcement about mental health awareness. At a first selection, the advert was chosen as the best of 60 entries and has been submitted for the VUKA Multi Media Awards competition under the category 'Newcomer'. If the advert wins, it will be aired on DSTV, which would be a great help to improve mental health awareness and combat the stigma associated with mental disorders.



Almost half of the calls (46.3%) were related to depression or anxiety disorders. 15% of callers enquired about unipolar depression, 1/5 Anxiety Disorders, 10.8% Bipolar depression, 7.1% Schizophrenia and 7% requested information on the MHIC events and services. 7% of callers required information on more than one topic e.g. depression and substance abuse, anxiety/ behavioural problems in children.

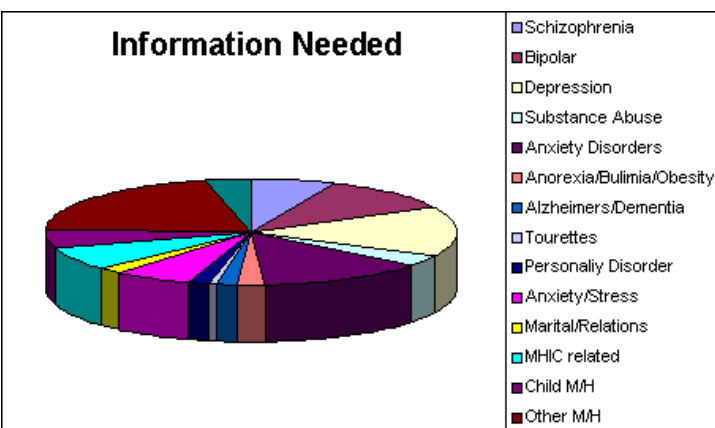
In most calls telephonic info was provided. 10% of calls required more than one intervention with the most frequent being providing telephonic info as well as emailed (25.5%) or mailed (23.6%) info, referral to a mental health professional (25.5%), or referral to a support group (10.9%).

RESEARCH

We conducted a survey amongst South African General Practitioners and Paediatricians about their knowledge and awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorder and presented a poster (with Dr Bennie Steyn and Dr Bavi Vythilingum) at the World Autism Conference.



Picture 1: Dr Bennie Steyn, Sharain Suliman & Winnie De Roover in front of the poster at the World Autism Conference.



Most callers got our number from the internet, a magazine article, or word of mouth.

One third of our callers were patient, 1/3 family or friend, and 16,2% were mental health professionals from all disciplines.

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 exhibition tables 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.

Picture 2: Allen Liwani at the MRC Youth Day exhibition table

On 16 & 17 August the MHIC staff manned an exhibition table at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Stellenbosch's 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.

On 31 October & 1 Nov the MHIC attended the World Autism Conference where we were able to display our educational material.



Picture 3: Sharain Suliman at the World Autism Conference exhibition table

On 23 November the Mental Health Information Centre participated once more in the ABSA Employee Health 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..



Picture 4: Nursing student at the ABSA Health Day exhibition table

AWARENESS EVENTS



Brain Awareness Week

Every year in March, hundreds of innovative public events and activities worldwide bring the excitement of scientific progress in brain research to the general public during a campaign called **Brain Awareness Week**. Coordinated by the European Dana Alliance for the Brain, and the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives in the US, Brain Awareness Week has become a major international collaboration. The Brain Awareness Campaign unites more than 1,875 partner organizations; including schools, universities, medical and research organizations, patient advocacy groups, government agencies, service groups, and professional organizations in 62 countries; all communicating the progress of brain research. This year Brain Awareness Week was celebrated on 13-19 March. The MHIC's contribution to this campaign mainly consisted of media liaison, resulting in various written pieces and radio-interviews. As in previous years, our call centre answered calls from the public and professionals and information packages were distributed to a selection of relevant support groups and interested callers.

World Mental Health Day



WORLD FEDERATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH



Every year since 1992 governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations have participated in commemorating World Mental Health Day on 10 October. The theme for 2006, as set out by the World Federation for Mental Health, was "Building Awareness - Reducing Risk: Mental Illness and Suicide".

The World Health Organisation estimates that over one million people die by suicide each year. Non-fatal self-inflicted injuries are probably at least 20 times greater than completed suicides. In many cases suicide represents a tragic consequence of failing to recognize and treat severe mental illness. World Mental Health Day is an opportunity for improving public awareness, reducing stigma and discrimination and for promoting service and policy delivery to address the impact that suicide associated with mental illness has on the global burden of disease.

This year the MHIC collaborated with the MRC Health, Safety and Environmental Affairs department to distribute our brochures throughout the MRC (Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria), and received a number of calls from interested journalists further to our press release.

PUBLICATIONS

We updated and published the Mental Health Resource Guide 2006. We collaborated with the SA Federation for Mental Health resulting in a Resource Guide 2006 Addendum which contains resources for mentally disabled people. Keith Ross, from MRC Web and Media, assisted us greatly in also creating an electronic version of the Resource Guide. This electronically searchable mental health directory went 'live' on June the 20th and is currently available on SA Health Info (<http://www.sahealthinfo.org/resourceguide/mentalhealth.jsp>). This unique tool will help a great deal to improve access of the general public to mental health resources in Southern Africa.

COLLABORATION WITH MENTAL HEALTH STAKEHOLDERS

As resources for mental health are quite limited in South Africa, collaboration with mental health stakeholders is crucial to promote early diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders. We maintain regular contact with the consumer support groups such as SA Depression and Anxiety Group, Cape Support for Mental Health, BIG, SA Federation for Mental Health,... as they provide a really valuable service to the public. Other important partners are the Department of Health: Mental Health & Substance Abuse Sub-Directorate, professional organisation such as the SA Society of Psychiatrists, the SA Medical Association, the Medical Research Council, and the pharmaceutical industry.

We are also pleased to inform you about the formal launch of an exciting new project, the Brain Behaviour Initiative.

BBI-Launch: Brain Science Takes The Spotlight

In the week from 6- 10 Nov 2006, the University of Cape Town (UCT) launched the Brain Behaviour Initiative (BBI), one of the University's Signature Themes and a core component of the Cross-University Brain Behaviour Initiative (CUBBI), a joint project with the University of Stellenbosch (SUN). The event was held in conjunction with public lectures on the importance of neuroscience and neuropsychology research in the developing world, which were chaired by Professor Willie Daniels from the department of medical physiology at the SUN.

A public lecture keynote address was delivered by Prof. Michael Zigmond, a neurologist from the University of Pittsburgh in the USA. According to Professor Zigmond, neuroscience is one of the most rapidly growing areas in all of science, and could potentially make an impact on many problems facing South Africa and Africa, including the ability to provide effective and safe treatments for common mental illnesses.

Professor Cheryl de la Rey, Deputy Vice Chancellor of Research at UCT, reiterated the value of brain-behaviour research in South Africa in outlining the rationale for a BBI. Professor de la Rey also noted the importance of CUBBI and showed support and appreciation for the collaboration of the two universities. She noted that the CUBBI is a multi-disciplinary framework aimed at promoting research in the cognitive and affective neurosciences. These areas of research have been among the most rapidly advancing areas

COLLABORATION WITH MH STAKEHOLDERS (CONT.)



Picture 5: Prof de la Rey

of science in the past decade, as new experimental techniques – including brain imaging, genetic testing, and neuropsychological assessment – combined with new theoretical insights, have opened up significant potential for the advancement of novel diagnostic tools and treatment options for people with mental disorders. This is of particular importance locally, where neuropsychiatric disorders account for the largest portion of South Africa's burden of disease after HIV/AIDS.

Professor Dan Stein, Head of Psychiatry at UCT explained that the academic partnership with the SUN, aimed at bringing together brain-behaviour experts to address the most critical mental health problems facing the developing world, again beginning with a focus on trauma and resilience. "This research will help us understand why some people develop conditions such as posttraumatic stress disorder or substance abuse in response to stressors. This understanding is critical in a setting where there are high levels of violence." Professor Stein indicated that there was significant expertise across the two Universities in areas such as animal models, neurogenetics, and brain imaging, and thus enormous potential for synergy.

The CUBBI team looks forward to building capacity in these research areas, recruiting and developing new students in the brain-behaviour sciences and establishing the University as an internationally recognised contributor to neuroscientific knowledge.

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MHIC STAFF

In the past year the MHIC went through some staff changes:

End March we said our goodbyes to Johnny Daniels, who had been the MHIC administrator and webmaster for the past 2 years as well as administrator and data-capturer for the Genetics of Anxiety Disorders Research project which is being lead by Christine Lochner. Allen Liwani took over from Johnny for 6 months and will be replaced by Muriel Koopman mid December.

Kerrin Lewey, previously known from the Schizophrenia Foundation of South Africa, joined us as the MHIC office manager for 4months. She ensured the smooth day-to-day running of the call centre and was later replaced by Sharain Suliman, who 'jumped' in when Winnie De Roover, our director, required maternity leave to take care of the baby boy she adopted. Sharain, MA Research Psychology, worked for the MRC Research Unit on Anxiety Disorders some time back and had done volunteer work at the MHIC. This enabled her to fit in easily into the organisation and guaranteed that the MHIC's work was continued.

THE WAY FORWARD

Depending on funding, we would like to focus on the following items in 2007:

- Revamp the MHIC website in order to make more scientific, up-to-date mental health information easily accessible to the general public.
- Continue to provide a free of charge information service, with distribution of free hand-outs, pamphlets, brochures and posters.
- Focus on planning and driving one big awareness campaign and host the mental health media awards.
- Continue with media exposure, lay talks and exhibitions to increase awareness of general public.

MRC NEWS

MRC Staff

In 2006, the MRC Unit on Anxiety Disorders welcomed the following new employees: Keith Ganasen, Zoliswa Zenani, Robyn Kalan, Liezel le Roux (full-time), Fatima Parker, Annerine Roos (full-time), Helena Smit, and more recently, Roxanne Marthinussen and Sanja Kilian.

Roxanne Marthinussen is a research admin assistant. She is currently doing her Honours in Psychology, is administrative assistant to Soraya Seedat and is involved in the admin side (contacting participants, booking appointments, recruitment,) of various studies e.g. the mental health and TB, Bathuthuzele, HIV, Maternal stress and Mortuary studies.

Sanja Kilian is a research assistant in the Rape Prophylaxis & Adolescent rape studies as well as the Sydenham's Chorea study. She obtained a BA Language and Culture, did her Honours degree in Psychology and is currently completing a Masters in Psychology under the supervision of Prof L. Swartz.

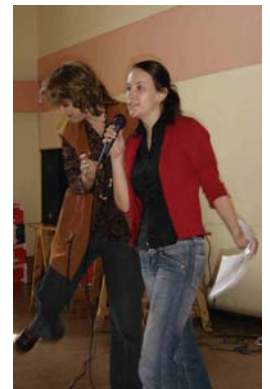
MRC NEWS (CONT.)

TB Awareness Day

On 31 August and 14 September, the Desmond Tutu TB Centre hosted a TB Awareness Day, which aimed to inform the residents from Uitsig, Ravensmead and Elsiesrivier about research trials in their communities. Roxanne and Sanja from the MRC Unit on Anxiety Disorders presented on mental health and what the TB and mental health study is about. Each awareness day was well attended (about 250 people per day) and apart from interesting talks, attendees were also offered food and prizes could be won. This awareness day therefore helped to get information on mental health out of the clinic, in an attempt to dispel any stigma and discrimination with regards to mental health and TB, including its link to HIV.



Pictures 5 & 6: Roxanne (left) and Sanja (right) presenting on mental health at the Tuberculosis Awareness Day



Achievements:

The Kenneth Warren Prize for best Cochrane Review from a developing nation was awarded to Prof Soraya Seedat, Jonathan Ipser, and Prof Dan Stein. Dr. Bavi Vythilingum was appointed to a Senior Specialist post at UCT.

James Warwick won the best poster award at the 2006 SA Society of Nuclear Medicine Congress in Port Elizabeth.



**BEST WISHES
FOR THE
FESTIVE SEASON !!!**



**MENTAL HEALTH
INFORMATION CENTRE**

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