



MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION CENTRE OF SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

As the new year has started with great fervour it is time to report back on our activities of the past months. In this newsletter you will be able to read about our new staff, next year's conference, our psycho-education and awareness activities, the MHIC website and publications as well as some news from the MRC Unit on Anxiety Disorders.

NEW STAFF AT THE MHIC

We would like to accord a very warm welcome to Muriel Koopman who joined us at the end of last year. Muriel has a diploma in Progressive Media and has been employed as part-time MHIC administrative officer. In the past few months she has shown herself to be very competent and effective in her work.

Apart from being a skilled webmaster she is responsible for our administrative and basic financial matters.

Muriel quickly learned to respond to the various calls in our call centre.



Picture1: Muriel

For the rest of her time Muriel works closely with Dr Christine Lochner as data-capturer and administrative assistant to the OCD project at the MRC Unit on Anxiety Disorders.

INTERNATIONAL ANXIETY DISORDERS SYMPOSIUM

Given the keen interest in and success of last year's anxiety conference, the MRC Unit on Anxiety Disorders has decided to host an International Anxiety Disorders Symposium on 17 and 18 March 2008.

The symposium will be organised in conjunction with the International Society for Affective Disorders' 4th Biennial Conference. The ISAD conference will consist of a series of parallel symposia held over 3 days (14- 17 March)

(for further details please visit www.isad.org.uk/2008/con_abstract.html).



The International Anxiety Disorders Symposium will host an excellent line-up of world-renowned speakers in the field of anxiety disorders such as Christer Allgulander (Sweden), David Baldwin (UK), Naomi Fineberg (UK), Donatella Marazziti (Italy), Stefano Pallanti (Italy).

The first announcement has gone out and can be found on the MHIC website (www.mentalhealthsa.co.za), poster abstracts will be accepted as soon as the IADS website is operational.

The ISAD/ IADS meeting will take place at the prestigious Arabella Sheraton in the heart of Cape Town thus offering our local and international delegates ample opportunity for sightseeing.

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PSYCHO EDUCATION & AWARENESS

Brain Awareness Week

Brain Awareness Week is an annual celebration dedicated to raising public awareness of the progress, promise, and benefits of brain research. On March 12- 18th 2007, Brain Awareness Week was celebrated worldwide. Hundreds of innovative public events

and activities brought the excitement of scientific progress to the general public.

Coordinated by the European Dana Alliance for the Brain and the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives in the US, this campaign unites more than 1,875 partner organisations; including schools, universities, medical and research organisations, patient groups, and professional organisations in 62 countries.

The MHIC focused on liaison with the media as well as collaboration with other mental health organisations in order to promote and support their specific Brain Awareness Events. Our call centre was at hand to answer calls from professionals and the public. Part of the local BAW activities was a Free Open Day at Panorama Medi-Clinic on 13 March 2007 with speakers as Dr. Frans Hugo, Gustav van Greunen, Karen Borochowitz focusing on Alzheimer's Disease & dementia.

Exhibitions

CPUT Wellness Week Celebration 27 – 29 March 2007

On 27-29 March 2007 the MHIC manned an exhibition stall at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)'s annual Wellness Week. A variety of wellness activities and exhibitions for staff and students aimed to promote and raise awareness of holistic wellness on campus, according to the following 7 dimensions of wellness: spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional, occupational,



Picture 2: MHIC stall at the CPUT

physical, and environmental. Mental health brochures and information were distributed to interested students.

Biological Psychiatry Conference



Picture 3: MHIC exhibition stall

The Mental Health Information Centre promoted its services and products to national and international psychiatrists while manning an exhibition table at the Biological Psychiatry Congress 2007.

PSYCHO EDUCATION & AWARENESS CONT.

This 2.5 day conference took place on 25-28 February at the Lord Charles Hotel in Somerset West. A stimulating mix of high level clinical and basic science updates were presented to an audience of 390 delegates and the local pharmaceutical industry.

PUBLICATIONS

The Mental Health Resource Guide of South Africa 2007-2008, has been sent off to the graphic designer. The tenth edition of this regularly updated publication will have more than 160 new entries, and several new categories. Initiated in 1996 through our work at our mental health call centre, this ever-expanding book is the only one of its kind regarding mental health in South Africa. The updating process takes about 8 months as every single mental health organisation or professional listed in the Resource Guide is contacted.

Sharain Suliman has been responsible for most of this work. The graphic design, proofreading and printing process takes another 2 months. As in previous years, two-thirds of the copies will be distributed through the SAMA journals and one third will be made available from our offices. We would like to thank our sponsors for making this possible. Our next step will consist of getting our database ready to update the electronically searchable version of the Mental Health Resource Guide (<http://www.sahealthinfo.org/resourceguide/mentalhealth.jsp>).

We have also been communicating with a Dutch author of two excellent bipolar booklets regarding translation and publication of these books in South Africa.

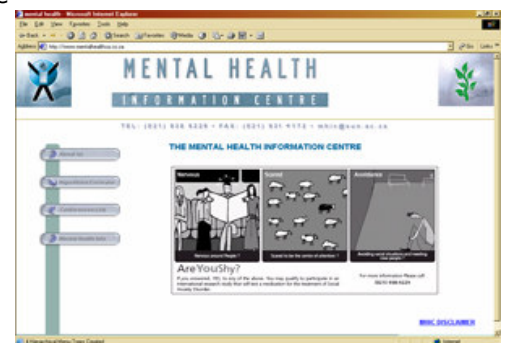
WEBSITE

During the first few 'quiet' months of the year, our main focus has been on updating and creating new content for the MHIC website. In the current age of information boom it is becoming increasingly important to make accurate, reliable, recent scientific information available to the general public and professionals. Muriel Koopman has developed a new outlay which will make the site much more appealing and user-friendly.

We have opted for two separate sections, one for consumers and one for professionals with various buttons for easy access. We are waiting for some technical difficulties to be resolved before the new content and revamped website will go live. Please keep an eye open for updates on www.mentalhealthsa.co.za.

We have also updated the content in the mental health section of SA Health Info, the Medical Research Council's portal for the general public.

In the next few months we will focus on updating the content of the MRC Unit Anxiety Disorders pages on the MRC website.



Picture 4: MHIC Website currently

MRC UNIT ON ANXIETY DISORDERS - NEWS UPDATE

Welcome

In the beginning of the year, several people joined the MRC Unit on Anxiety Disorders:

Ahmed-Riaz Mohamed was employed as a research assistant and is working predominantly on a research project entitled "Association of Maternal Depression and Other Psychiatric Outcomes With Long-Term Neurodevelopment in HIV-Positive Infants Receiving Early or Delayed Antiretroviral Treatment". He is also involved in aspects of the Bathuthuzele Youth Stress Clinic.

Ahmed's research interests lie in the area of psychological trauma and its relationship to issues of peace-building and 'reconciliation' in the aftermath of protracted political conflict. Ahmed is currently in the final stages of submitting his MA dissertation in Psychological Research (UCT) which is provisionally entitled "The Memory of the Past and the Struggle with the Present: An Investigation into the Restorative Possibilities of Providing Public Testimony at

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission". This is a qualitatively oriented project addressing the subjective experiences of victims of gross human rights violations in South Africa in terms of their public testimony to the TRC as well as the longer-term effects of having taken part in the process i.e. a decade after the TRC.



Picture 5: Ahmed

Lisa Aitken is a Clinical Psychologist (MPsych, UWC) who



Picture 5: Lisa

conducts neuropsychological assessments across the unit's studies, such as the Sydenham's Chorea studies and Bathuthuzele Youth Stress Clinic. Lisa has a specific interest in children's experiences of trauma.

Dylan Fincham obtained a MA Psychology cum laude at Stellenbosch University, and is currently completing a DPhil Psychology also at Stellenbosch University. He worked at Stellenbosch University for 3 years lecturing statistics, quantitative research methodology, and health psychology. Two years ago he went to Maastricht University in the Netherlands to study research methods in biological psychology and neuroscience. Dylan quickly turned into the resident statistician at the Unit and is currently involved in writing up some of the studies (MASC, GAD Symptom Severity Scale, Risks and Resilience in PTSD, Intermittent Explosive Disorder).

Mid March **Karin Swanepoel** joined the Unit as the new

Administrator. She has taken over from Helena Smit in

trying to assure the smooth running of the MRC Unit on Anxiety Disorders. Karin did a 2-year Secretarial course at the Paarl Technicon. She previously worked at an engineering company in Stellenbosch. Her hobbies are horse riding and any other outdoor activities.



Picture 6: Karin Swanepoel settling in in her new office

In addition to the newcomers, we have 2 visitors who joined the Unit for research electives (5-6 months):

Mr Ivar Jørgensen, from Norway, is here to do his masters thesis in Clinical Psychology.

Dr Pablo Pelayo, a Registrar in Psychiatry from Hospital Universitario Marques de Valdecilla, Santander, Spain, is here to gain some research experience.

Pablo is working on a research project entitled "Body Image Disturbance as a Risk Factor for Non-adherence to ARV treatment". The project has recently been approved by Ethics and will be conducted together with other

projects relating to AIDS and mental health in the Tygerberg Clinic for Infectious Diseases. Pablo is also preparing a review about cultural aspects in Sub-Saharan Africa related to the spreading and prevention of AIDS.



Picture 6: Dylan & Pablo

New MRI Scanner & Brain Imaging Centre

Brain imaging is one of the major strategic areas in the Cross University Brain Behaviour Initiative (joint effort of University of Cape Town and University of Stellenbosch) because of its enormous potential in understanding trauma and resilience. One of the most significant developments in this regard has been the acquisition of state of the art 3-Tesla Siemens Allegra Magnetic Resonance Scanner- the first of its kind in Southern Africa- by the Stellenbosch Faculty of Health Sciences, with support from UCT and Siemens.

This MRI scanner, which has high spec functional perfusion, diffusion and proton spectroscopy capacities, will be housed in the newly constructed Brain Imaging Centre in the basement of the Fisan building.



Picture 7: MRI scanner's arrival at the US Sciences Faculty

MRC UNIT ON ANXIETY DISORDERS - NEWS UPDATE CONTINUED

The BIC will include an EEG laboratory and near infra-red spectroscopy facility.

The BIC will be officially opened by the Minister of Science & Technology on 31 May.

Congratulations

Congratulations to **Prof Soraya Seedat**, who was among 18 newly elected members of the Academy of Science of South Africa. This is a very prestigious organisation, a national "brains trust" of top-ranked researchers, and to our knowledge she is the first psychiatrist to receive this honour.

The Cross-University Brain-Behaviour Initiative is focused on understanding the psychobiology of trauma and resilience. However, some members of CUBBI are focused more on prevention and treatment efforts. Given the shortage of clinicians in outlying areas, Beauty Mlanjeni of the University of Cape Town and Winnie De Roover of the Mental Health Information Centre at the University of Stellenbosch, together with their Dutch collaborators (Prof Pim Cuijpers and colleagues) and Prof. Isaac Marks, have been doing preliminary work on translating materials for use on the internet. This work received the **E-ward** (an award for innovations in internet-delivered mental health treatment) from the Trimbos Institute (Dutch Institute of Mental Health and Addiction) and GGZ Nederland (National Mental Health Association of the Netherlands). The funds will be used to develop the work into a research project.

Congratulations to **Dr Tim Newman**, who has been appointed Professor Extraordinary at the University of Stellenbosch. Professor Tim Newman managed the Brain Behaviour Initiative (BBI) since August last year. He was instrumental in the launch of the BBI and in supporting efforts to bridge South African brain-behaviour research.

He has left the project to head up the neuroscience and functional genomics program of the National Bioinformatics Network.

Congratulations to **Jonathan Ipser** who took over the CUBBI project manager position from Prof Tim Newman. Jonathan is intimately familiar with the BBI, having been involved with the initiative since its inception. Jonathan is currently a PhD student investigating the behavioural endophenotypes in posttraumatic stress disorder and he looks forward to playing a key role in mobilising resources to further neuroscience and related research in South Africa and building capacity in this area. We wish Tim and Jonathan all the best in their new positions.

Congratulations to **Sian Hemming** who gave birth to a healthy baby boy mid January, named Joseph Ken Chaplin.

Now recruiting- Social Anxiety Disorders Study

We are recruiting participants for a research trial to determine if a novel oral treatment for anxiety (GW876008, a corticotrophin releasing factor receptor antagonist) is effective in Social Anxiety Disorder. The study is voluntary and consists of 12 weeks of treatment and about 16 visits to the MRC Unit in total. All participants will undergo a very thorough assessment at every visit. The assessments and treatment are safe. Each visit will take approximately 2 hours. Routine physical examinations, psychiatric evaluations, ECG and study medication will be provided to the participants at no cost. However, there is a 1 in 2 chance that participants will be receiving a placebo.

Please contact the Mental Health Information Centre (021 938 9229, mhic@sun.ac.za) for more information.



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