



CCRN News

Centre for Clinical Research in Neuropsychiatry

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What Did the WHO Studies on Schizophrenia Really Find?

In September 2007, *Schizophrenia Bulletin* published an article entitled "Questioning an Axiom: Better Prognosis for Schizophrenia in the Developing World?" by Alex Cohen, Vikram Patel, R Thara, and Oye Gureje.

Cohen and his collaborators argued that the data produced by three prominent WHO schizophrenia research projects showed that people living with schizophrenia in developing countries may actually have better outcomes than those living in developed countries.

CCRN Director Professor Assen Jablensky and colleague Norman Sartorius, the WHO project's chief investigators, have presented a vigorous rebuttal to Cohen's argument. The WHO studies did not find a uniformly better outcome for people living in developed countries, nor did the studies disregard the role of culture in shaping disease outcome.

What the WHO studies have shown conclusively is that culture is a powerful factor in the clinical picture of schizophrenia. Patients in developing countries had longer periods of unimpaired functioning in the community, although only 16% were on continuous antipsychotic medication, compared with 61% in developed countries. High rates of complete clinical remission (37%) were more common in developing countries (compared to 15.5% in developed countries), but the rates of chronic illness did not differ

significantly.

Jablensky and Sartorius noted that the factors involved in schizophrenia recovery are complex. The best predictors of outcome were: type of onset (insidious versus acute) and type of setting (developed versus developing country), marital status, gender, social isolation and drug abuse.

The high rates of chronic disability associated with schizophrenia in developed countries, despite access to costly biomedical treatment, "suggests that something essential to recovery is missing in the social fabric." The existence of "huge gaps" in mental health service provision between high- and low-income countries, and globalisation-induced erosion of social support systems, "should be a matter of grave concern."

Jablensky A, Sartorius N. (2008) What did the WHO studies really find? *Schizophrenia Bulletin* March; 34(2):253-55.

The journal *Psychiatric News*, March 7, 2008 (vol 43, no 5, p 27) provides an overview of the debate at <http://pn.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/43/5/27?eaf>

New website for CCRN

CCRN has a new website at <http://www.health.wa.gov.au/ccrn/>
Visit our site for WAFSS information, research projects, postgraduate studies, software downloads and training opportunities.



The CCRN is a specialised research facility of the University of Western Australia's School of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences, funded and operated jointly by the School and the North Metropolitan Area Mental Health Service.

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Congratulations to Georgie Paulik PhD

Georgie Paulik's thesis 'Inhibition and Anxiety in the Development of Auditory Hallucinations', co-supervised by CCRN's Dr Johanna Badcock, has been passed. This research was supported by the Schizophrenia Research Institute (Ron & Peggy Bell Foundation), plus infrastructure support from CCRN, WA Health and the UWA School of Psychology. Dr Paulik is currently volunteering as a mental health support worker in Thailand.

Visiting Speakers at CCRN, January–June 2008



Richard Bell spoke on *'Revisiting the Vision for Early Episode Psychosis Services in Western Australia'* on 29 April. Richard is a psychologist and consultant to the Youth Early Psychotic Service (YEPS), part of the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre (EPPIC) statewide service in Victoria. Late adolescence and early adulthood is the peak period of onset for many mental illnesses, including schizophrenia. Experiencing a mental illness can leave the individual with reduced ability to function, so early intervention is critical to help minimise or prevent future episodes. Cognitive behavioural therapy, however, has given mental health professionals grounds for optimism with its new advances in early psychosis treatment.

Associate Professor Nicholas Stefanis (pictured here with CCRN researchers Milan Dragovic, left, and Jo Badcock, right), of the Mental Health Research Institute at the University of Athens Medical School, gave a seminar presentation on 30 April entitled *'Do susceptibility schizophrenia genes affect apparently healthy individuals?'*

Exploring the massive subclinical potential for schizophrenia diagnosis in the general population, Stefanis' project has studied a group of over 2000 male Greek Air Force conscripts, undertaking eight assessments over a two-year period. The project, which examined each individual's schizotypy, cognitive abilities and genetic profile, has produced results indicating that stress is a significant factor in triggering psychotic episodes in the general population.



Associate Professor Christer Allgulander, of the Karolinska Institutet, Sweden, gave a seminar on Friday 2 May on *'Generalized Anxiety Disorder - New Findings and Treatments'*, introduced by Professor Aleksandar Janca (seen here with Christer Allgulander and Dr Sean Hood, School of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences). Allgulander presented a history of GAD, tools for diagnosis, and a range of therapies that had helped produce an 80% remission rate after one year of treatment.

People experiencing major anxiety may actually constitute the second-largest primary care group, but only 13% present with anxiety as the primary complaint. Instead, they may describe a

range of related issues such as sleeplessness, pain, or depression. Left untreated, GAD may also be a critical factor in somatic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, chronic pain and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Professor Barry Nurcombe spoke on Friday 6 June on *'The Psychopathology and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse'*. Professor Nurcombe, Emeritus Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Queensland, has been establishing an academic unit in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Princess Margaret Hospital for Children.

It is difficult to estimate the actual prevalence of child sexual abuse, due to potential underreporting and the retrospective nature of many studies. There are reports of levels as high as around 30% of all respondents, and adult outcomes can include poor relationships, emotional distress, substance abuse, sexual dysfunction, dissociation, damaging lifestyles, and perpetration. Trends in psychotherapeutic intervention have included group therapy in the 1980s, cognitive behavioural therapy in the 1990s, and presently psychodynamic and family therapy.



CCRN Launches New Clinical Applications Unit



CCRN's new Clinical Applications Unit will use local research findings to develop care coordination packages, designed to improve outcomes for mental health consumers with complex cross-jurisdictional needs.

According to CAU director Dr Daniel Rock, better coordination of care within and between agencies not only improves quality of life, but at the same time spends health dollars more effectively. "The mentally ill are much more likely to smoke, abuse alcohol and other substances, be obese, have a poor diet, and not exercise. All of these are associated with the development of chronic and life-threatening physical disorders."

CAU's first project, the Mental Health Early Life Programme (MHELP) will be formally launched by Dr Fiona Stanley on 22 July 2008 at the former Heathcote Hospital. "Women with serious mental illness may have limited knowledge about sexuality, high rates of coerced sex, low contraceptive usage, more unwanted pregnancies, poor compliance with antenatal care, higher rates of pregnancy and birth complication and severe parenting difficulties," said Dr Rock.

Other projects under development include new ways of helping women with schizophrenia and their children, plans for more streamlined care for people who self-harm, and a cancer care coordination project for mental health consumers.

For more information:

CAU: Dr Daniel Rock on 9347 6405, Daniel.Rock@health.wa.gov.au

MHELP: Dr Yvonne Hauck at y.hauck@curtin.edu.au

22 July launch: Lucy Monte at lucy.monte@health.wa.gov.au

Estimating premorbid intelligence in schizophrenia patients: A demographically-based approach

CCRN researchers Milan Dragovic, Flavie Waters and Assen Jablensky have recently published research into the premorbid estimated intelligence (IQ prior to the start of the illness) of people with schizophrenia.

The development of schizophrenia often starts in adolescence or during early adulthood, with dire consequences for school completion, and reduced employment opportunities. People with schizophrenia frequently show neuropsychological decline following the onset of their illness.

Premorbid IQ can be estimated with regression equations, using common demographic variables such as age, education and occupational status. The results of this study demonstrated that regression equations developed for healthy people are not suitable for accurately estimating premorbid IQ in people with schizophrenia.

So how can premorbid IQ be measured more accurately? Milan Dragovic has developed a software program which calculates premorbid intelligence using demographic variables in people who have been diagnosed with schizophrenia. This may now provide a more reliable estimate of premorbid IQ.

Demographically-based equations have long been used as part of neuropsychological assessments of acquired cerebral dysfunction. They are considered to provide reliable estimates of premorbid IQ, and correlate highly with measures of intelligence.

The software, known as PICQ, can be downloaded from CCRN's website at:
www.health.wa.gov.au/ccrn/

Dragovic, M, Waters, F, Jablensky, A. Estimating premorbid intelligence in schizophrenia patients: A demographically-based approach. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, in press.

Postgraduate Students at CCRN

Matthew Albrecht (PhD student): Gamma function during cross-modal congruent and incongruent stimuli in schizophrenia
Supervisors: A/Prof Mathew Martin-Iverson, Dr Kyle R Dyer, Dr Greg Price

Shahzad Mazhari (PhD student): Cortical inhibitory deficits as a core feature of schizophrenia: electrophysiological and neurocognitive studies
Supervisors: Professor Assen Jablensky, Dr Greg Price, Dr Milan Dragovic, Dr Flavie Waters

Zak Miller (PhD student): Non-monoaminergic pathways involved in the acute prosocial effects of MDMA
Supervisor: A/Prof Mathew Martin-Iverson

Kirsty Scholes (PhD student): The effects of cannabis use on eye blinks and brain function
Supervisor: A/Prof Mathew Martin-Iverson

Chris Stoddart (PhD student): Inheritance of dopaminergic phenotypes in congenic strains of C3H/ mice and their relationships to a novel method of PPI analysis
Supervisors: A/Prof Mathew Martin-Iverson, Dr Nadia Urošević

Volunteering—Questions and Answers

Can I find out my results?

Research testing isn't the same as sitting an exam or having a medical test for a health problem. Your 'results', as such, wouldn't make any sense by themselves. So if you are a control participant, for example, your results will be combined with the rest of the control participants, and then compared to the results obtained from the other group being studied (such as people with schizophrenia).

What happens to the information?

The researcher takes all the data collected, which includes reading tests, computer-based tests, and blood or urine specimens. Then they look for patterns in the response from the different groups. These patterns—or lack of them—help to answer their research question.

What kind of things can you find out?

Here's an example. Recently, you may have participated in a study where you had to point, as accurately as possible, to targets presented on a touch-sensitive screen. This study found that overall, people with schizophrenia took longer to detect a target than controls.

Is that important?

Yes. It helped the researchers to challenge previous experiments into what is called 'fine-grained encoding of spatial information' in schizophrenia. It also confirmed that people with schizophrenia may experience difficulty

maintaining both direction and distance details in their working memory.

So how did I help?

These findings were published, so that other researchers could discuss them, challenge them, or try to duplicate them. This opens the way for new research into the brain and its behaviour. So just by volunteering, you've made a real contribution to improving knowledge about schizophrenia and other mental illnesses.

Thank you!

Badcock, J.C., Badcock, D.R., Read, C. & Jablensky, A. (2008). Examining encoding imprecision in spatial working memory in schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia Research*, 100, 1-3, 144-152.

CCRN Diary July–December 2008

Please RSVP for all events to
Lorraine.Bahri@health.wa.gov.au, or phone 9347 6429

Fri 25 July 2008

CCRN Research Seminar

'Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS) in depression'

Greg Price and Joseph Lee

Seminar Room 3, Gascoyne House

2pm-3pm

Fri 15 August 2008

CCRN Research Seminar

'Diagnosis and treatment of personality disorders in India and Australia'

John P John (Bangalore) and Mohan Isaac

CCRN Seminar Room

2pm-3pm

Fri 12 September 2008

CCRN Research Seminar

'Intellectual disability co-occurring with schizophrenia and other psychiatric illness'

Vera Morgan

CCRN Seminar Room

2pm-3pm

Fri 14 November 2008

PhD work in progress

Sonja Bouwer, Shahrzad Mazhari

Fri 21 November 2008

CCRN Research Seminar

tba

Thomas McNeil

CCRN Seminar Room

2pm-3pm

Vista Public Lecture 'Mental Health 2020'

Wed 27 August 2008

12.30pm–2.00pm

'Mental Health 2020:

challenges and opportunities'

Professor Assen Jablensky

The *Vista Public Lecture Series* is a major new initiative of the State Administrative Tribunal (SAT) which is supported by His Excellency Dr Ken Michael AC, the Governor of Western Australia, as Patron of the series.

SAT has invited a number of outstanding Western Australians to address topics of general community importance. The theme for the 2008 series is '20/20 Vision'. The speakers will present their view on the likely state of affairs in Western Australia in the year 2020. Each lecture will be delivered in Government House Ballroom and is open to the public free of charge.

Seats for the lectures may be reserved by emailing SAT on info@sat.justice.wa.gov.au

