

October 2010

Special edition – Highlights of Australian Schizophrenia Conference (ASC 2010)

“ASC 2010 has matured over recent years and now reflects the depth of skill in the Australian research community’.

Professor John McGrath, Queensland Brain Institute

“Young blood, young talent... Australia is doing well in schizophrenia research!”

Professor Assen Jablensky, University of Western Australia

“ASC 2010 really showcased the wide variety of research into schizophrenia in Australia from basic science through to clinical and functional interventions. The schizophrenia research community in Australia is definitely punching above its weight”

Associate Professor Eóin Killackey, Orygen Youth Health Research Centre

Has Research been of benefit to patients with Schizophrenia

Such an important topic drew Kerry O'Brien away from the 7.30 Report to moderate a prestigious panel of speakers and manage an interactive crowd of almost 300 people in Sydney on 21st September. The six panellists included patient ambassador Richard Schweizer, Australian of the Year Prof. Patrick McGorry, International speaker, Prof. David Penn, Institute CEO Prof. Vaughan Carr, Macquarie Group Foundation Chair of Schizophrenia Research Prof. Cyndi Shannon Weickert and Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW representative Elaine Goddard.

The attentive audience included patients, carers, relatives and interested individuals who wanted to get a greater insight into the illness and its issues. Although the panellists held the floor for the first hour, the

audience was chomping at the bit to have their say for the second half.

Issues discussed included the importance of early diagnosis, ongoing stigma and how that affects outcomes for patients and families, side effects of medications, problems for carers with privacy laws and lack of best practice services.

The answers to the question appeared to be Yes and No. There have been improvements through greater understanding, acknowledgement that schizophrenia is a physiologically based illness, new medications and new psychosocial treatments. However improved medications without as many side effects are needed and psychosocial treatments are not readily available.



Kerry O'Brien

“An absolutely top notch panel, intelligently moderated, delivered always with heart, and with sharp focus on the facts.”

Audience member

And so much more needs to be done. Which is why the ASC 2010 conference held from 22-24 September has been such an important meeting of minds for those who have dedicated their lives to finding ways to prevent and cure schizophrenia. Lack of funding needs to be addressed in line with other illnesses and with mental health placed much higher on the national agenda than before, there is a strong push to make these changes.

For those who couldn't attend and would like more information on the forum please contact Megan Diallo on mdiallo@schizophreniaresearch.org.au

CEO's Report

ASC 2010 has been a great conference, bringing together some of the best minds in schizophrenia research, not just from Australia but internationally.

The conference was officially opened by Her Excellency, Prof. Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of NSW who commented on how far we have come in our understanding of schizophrenia and congratulated the participants on the impressive program, sending a strong message of encouragement to those working in this field.

With record attendance of over 350 delegates, the success of the conference is mainly due to the wide range of research covered

from psychosocial treatments to molecular genetics.

Although many sessions were aimed at a specialized area, the plenary speakers brought an integrated view and showcased the bigger picture for schizophrenia research.

Genetics research findings that were presented highlighted the extraordinary complexity of the new universe of molecular genetics, and work attempting to link these findings to aspects of brain functioning in schizophrenia is an exciting new frontier of discovery.

The conference highlighted the exceptional breadth and depth of schizophrenia-related research



Prof. Vaughan Carr, Chief Executive Officer
Prof. Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of NSW

being conducted in Australia, to which the Schizophrenia Research Institute is a major contributor.

Special thanks are due to Director of Operations, Daren Draganic for his outstanding work behind the scenes in making the conference such a resounding success.

Research aims to improve job retention

Institute scientists, Dr Melissa Green (University of NSW) and Associate Professor Robyn Langdon (Macquarie University) are collaborating with Associate Professor Eóin Killackey and a team of researchers from Orygen Youth Health Research Centre in Melbourne, to help people with schizophrenia find and retain employment.

Assoc. Prof. Killackey presented at the ASC 2010 on the benefits of gaining employment for people with mental illness. Although up to 95% of people with schizophrenia are unemployed,



Prof. Eóin Killackey; Dr Melissa Green

the majority cite gaining employment as their top goal. Meaningful work is important for most people but for people with mental illness it is protective against homelessness, loneliness, poor physical health, drug use, and criminal involvement.

Through individual placement and support, Assoc. Prof. Killackey's pilot research in Melbourne has had a 69% success rate with getting competitive jobs for young people who have experienced a first episode of psychosis. However, although stable on medication, many of these young people did not maintain their positions for longer than a few months, reporting difficulties with interpersonal skills in the workplace. There is not much evidence that medications can improve social cognition in schizophrenia but new psychosocial treatments are proving successful. International

speaker at the ASC 2010 Prof. David Penn explained how new interventions targeting social cognition may be a useful adjunct to existing methods for vocational rehabilitation.

With Dr Green's experience in social cognitive remediation, and Assoc. Prof. Langdon's expertise in social cognition, a team of researchers in Sydney and Melbourne are planning to work with Assoc. Prof. Killackey to augment individual placement and support techniques for vocational rehabilitation with social cognitive skills training, in the hope that young people with an emerging psychotic disorder might find work and keep their positions. The study will use Prof. Penn's training program to improve emotional perception (e.g., how we interpret other's facial expressions), 'Theory of Mind' skills (i.e., the ability to understand the mental state of others) and Attributional Style (e.g., blaming others, jumping to conclusions).

The study is an important step towards decreasing the economic cost and improving the daily lives of people living with schizophrenia.



Images above from left to right:
Richard Schweizer and Prof. Patrick McGorry;
Prof. Lynn DeLisi.

Genetics Workshop

One of the highlights and most talked about sessions of the ASC 2010 was the Genetics Workshop held by Prof. Cyndi Shannon Weickert, Macquarie Group Foundation Chair of Schizophrenia Research and Prof. Lynn DeLisi from the Schizophrenia International Research Society (SIRS).

The workshop consisted of presentations from Australian and international experts, and practical discussion on ways genetic information can be used in schizophrenia research. It also provided practical education and training regarding the terms and concepts used in the evolving field of molecular genetics.

The workshop was sponsored by Australian Psychosis Research Network (APRN) and SIRS.



Prof. Cyndi Shannon Weickert

LARGEST NATIONAL STUDY OF PSYCHOSIS

An overview of the second national epidemiology survey of the prevalence and profile of people with psychosis in Australia was presented at ASC 2010 by Prof. Vera Morgan from UWA School of Psychiatry & Clinical Neurosciences.

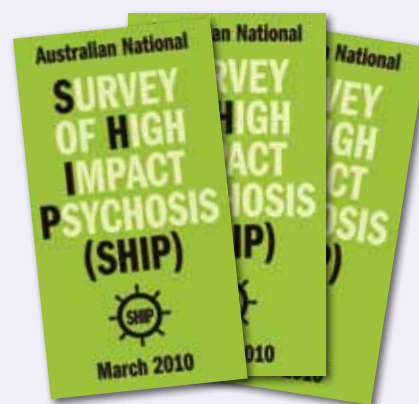
It has been 12 years since the first study was completed and the Survey of High Impact Psychosis (SHIP), funded by the Department of Health & Aging, commenced this year.

2000 people with psychosis, aged 18-64, are currently being interviewed and assessed with a set questionnaire. These are people identified through inpatient and outpatient services and NGOs in Western Australian, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria.

The survey aims to identify modifiable risk factors for good outcome. It will examine factors related to social inclusion such as employment and other social roles, look at accommodation (including homelessness) and social isolation, and assess levels of disability in the activities of daily living. The survey includes a physical health assessment with testing for cardiovascular risk factors and an assessment of cognitive function. Information will also be collected on services for people with psychosis and areas of unmet need.

The survey includes separate ethics to collect blood for DNA analysis through the Australian Schizophrenia Research Bank.

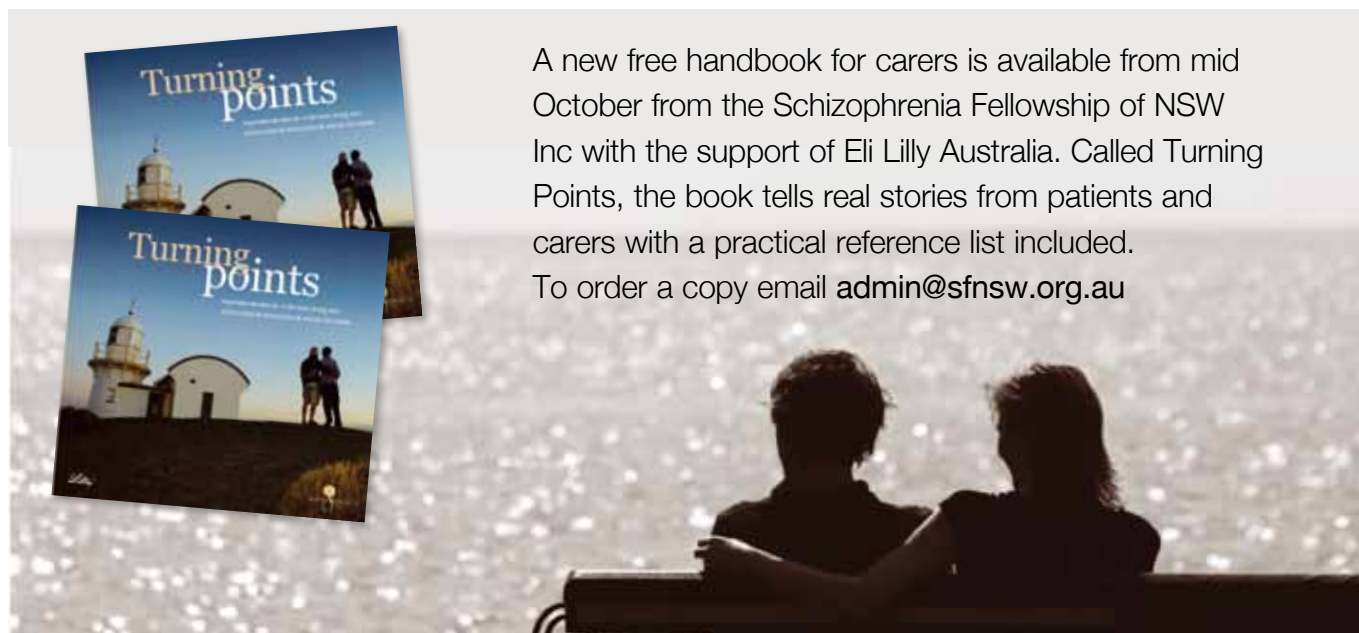
Results will be published in July 2011 and the data will become available for use by other researchers in 2013.



Prof. Vera Morgan

Christmas cards

Order your personalised Christmas cards and 40% of the cost will go to the Schizophrenia Research Institute
www.christmascards4charity.com.au/sri



A new free handbook for carers is available from mid October from the Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW Inc with the support of Eli Lilly Australia. Called Turning Points, the book tells real stories from patients and carers with a practical reference list included. To order a copy email admin@sfnswh.org.au

The Schizophrenia Research Institute is the only national medical research institute solely dedicated to discovering the ways to prevent and cure schizophrenia. A registered charity throughout Australia, we rely on donations to continue our work.

Please help by completing and mailing this form to:

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