

Research Report: June 2014

PSYCHOLOGY

Mental Health

Ms Lil Vrklevski – *Professional Senior Psychology, SLHD Mental Health Service, Concord Centre for Mental Health, Director Psychology SLHD*

1. Research:

Psychologists have expertise in human behaviour, having studied the brain, memory, learning, human development and the processes determining how people think, feel, behave, and react. Psychologists apply their expertise using reliable and scientifically supported methods. Psychological therapies are widely used to treat individuals and families and can also be applied to groups and organisations. The research conducted by psychologists in the SLHD covers all aspects of human behaviour and functioning.

2. Key Achievements: 2013 – 2014

- Social Cognitive Remediation study commenced.
- CCMH – Research on the effects of ECT treatment on autobiographical memory – Sarah Jacek, Dr Joanna Ho, Dr Graeme Halliday & Dr Hassan Mehdi.
- Evaluation of outpatient binge-eating group.
- Evaluation of eating disorder outpatient clinic.
- Evaluating education provided to residential aged care facilities ‘What nurses’ want.’
- Research into support needs of people with dementia after they leave hospital.
- Evaluation of dyslexia assessment tool showing poor sensitivity and introduction in Jan 2013 of internationally recognised Dyslexia Screening Test for children born extremely preterm at aged 5 with follow-up at 8 years. Project duration 5 years.
- Training Package for Psychology Supervisors: A Competency-Based Initiative with Flexible Delivery Components.
- Identifying Cognitive and Demographic Variables that Contribute to Carer Burden in Dementia.
- The role of Allied Health in the future of Mental Health Services in the Public Sector.
- An evaluation of a pilot community forensic consultation clinic for high risk civilian patients.
- Quality of life in mesothelioma: anxiety and depression.

Joint projects with Macquarie University:

- Remediation of mental-state reasoning and emotion recognition in schizophrenia.
- Moral reasoning and mental illness: Towards a model of moral

ECT Research

ECT is a very efficacious form of treatment still used for major psychiatric disorders including depression and schizophrenia. One reason for its ongoing use is that it typically bypasses many of physical side effects that occur as a result of the medications, such as the metabolic syndrome and cardiac problems. However ongoing cognitive impairment can occur as a result of ECT, however the specifics of some of this are unclear.

There is evidence to suggest that index ECT treatment can affect autobiographical memory but whether maintenance ECT (mECT – ECT given continuously following an index course) leads to ongoing impairments is presently unclear. We have established a protocol which enables us to review the cognitive functioning of patients to determine any cognitive change over time. Review of mood and anaesthetic review are also goals of this clinic.

In 2009 discussion commenced between Sarah Jacek and Dr Hassan Mehdi regarding assessment of patients prior to, and following index ECT and assessment during maintenance ECT. Some assessments were conducted but no formal evaluation was done at this time.

In 2012 talks re-commenced between Sarah Jacek, Dr Mehdi as well as Dr Graeme Halliday and Dr Joanna Ho regarding establishing a protocol to routinely evaluate the cognitive functioning of patients receiving mECT

In March 2013 testing commenced on patients. Dr Andrew Jones joined the team in November 2013. Patient testing is currently ongoing.

SoCog Program

Social cognitive remediation using the SoCog program (developed by Dr Pamela Marsh) trains people in two areas:

- i. Mental state reasoning (such as irony, metaphor, and humour) as well as
- ii. emotion recognition training.

The program has been well received by consumers and pilot tests have demonstrated a trend towards improved recognition of emotion, as well as some generalisation to more complex theory of mind tasks.

Cognitive impairment is a key and enduring symptom of schizophrenia, with significant functional implications. In fact, cognitive impairment is believed to be a good predictor of functional outcome in this population (Green, 2006). One aspect of cognition is a concept called social cognition, which involves the processes by which people understand others in social situations. Difficulties with processing this information have significant effects on how people socialize as well as their relationships and how much they isolate. In a review of 15 studies (Schmidt et al, 2011) social cognition was found to be a mediating variable between poor cognitive functioning and functional outcome.

- July 2011 Contact made with Dr Marsh to begin using the program at CCMH
- January 2012 training was done with staff at CCMH to begin running SoCog groups

- 2012 – ethics approval sought and granted to test and treat at CCMH using the SoCog program
- February 2014 – Pilot group has commenced and is currently running. Plan will be to perform pre and post testing for the next round of groups in order to start collecting data

3. Research Staff:

Dr Graeme Halliday, CCMH Senior Staff Specialist Psychogeriatrician
Dr Hassan Mehdi, Consultant Psychiatrist
Dr Joanna Ho, Clinical Neuropsychologist
Dr Andrew Jones, Clinical Neuropsychologist
Ms Sarah Jacek, Clinical Neuropsychologist
Ms Lil Vrklevski – Professional Senior Psychologist Mental Health
Dr Pamela Marsh, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, CCD
Dr Robyn Langdon
Dr Jonathon Maguire
Dr Deborah Koder
Dr Crista Wocadlo

4. Contact details for department

Sarah Jacek
Clinical Neuropsychologist | Concord Centre for Mental Health
Unit 2 Kirkbride, Hospital Road, Concord, NSW, 2139
Tel (02) 9767 8754 | Fax (02) 9767 8734 | Sarah.Jacek@sswahs.nsw.gov.au

Lil Vrklevski
Director Psychology SLHD | Concord Centre for Mental Health
Unit 2 Kirkbride, Hospital Road, Concord, NSW, 2139
Tel (02) 9767 8757 | Fax (02) 9767 8734 | Lil.Vrklevski@sswahs.nsw.gov.au