



October 2007

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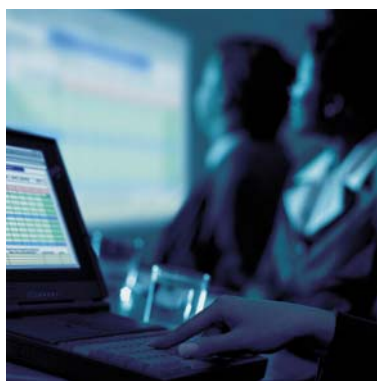
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Research offers new hope for drug dependants

Georgia Spokes Aug 21, 2007

The findings could change the way drug addiction is treated. (Reuters: Dylan Martinez)

Anti-drug campaigners often use the slogan "Just Say No", but saying "no" may be harder for long-term drug users because the habit has taken over part of their brain.

Melbourne scientists have found the brain's decision-making section is highly ineffective in such users.

The findings could change the way drug addiction is treated.

Dr Murat Yucel and his University of Melbourne colleagues examined the brain activity of 30 long-term drug users.

All were aged around 30, considered fairly intelligent and had mainly used heroin.

The subjects completed various tasks while their brains were scanned using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).

The results were then compared to the same tests completed by non-drug users.

Dr Yucel says they showed that in drug users, the frontal cortex of the brain was highly inefficient.

"It's a part that's particularly involved in helping us regulate our thoughts, emotions and behaviours and it's in this part of the brain that things aren't quite working right," he said.

"It helps us understand why it is so difficult for people who have a drug addiction problem to give up and why they continually relapse back into their maladaptive drug-taking behaviours.

"Second of all, it educates us that it's not due to a lack of willpower or moral weakness that people continue to relapse, but there's a biological contribution to that relapse."

Surprising results

Long-term drug user and study participant Linda found the results surprising.

"I would like to think that I'm a relatively intelligent person and to find that my brain has to work harder to do the things that all of you do on an everyday basis actually shocked me," she said.

"But then in retrospect, you put toxic chemicals in your body, some damage should occur."

Drug addiction specialist Sonia Burton says the findings provide an important insight.

"People with cognitive impairment will quite often present to services and may for example even present to areas like criminal justice etc and appear like they're unwilling to be rehabilitated or appearing to show, for example, no sense of remorse or capacity to change their behaviour," she said.

"When in actual fact the cognitive functioning that is needed for that has actually been lost."

She says that means there will be changes in the way long-term addicts are treated.

"For example, if your short-term memory is impaired, then things like telephone counselling may not really be that useful," she said.

"Cognitive behaviour therapy for example really does need to be looked at in terms of its effectiveness if you're working with somebody whose frontal lobe has been severely damaged."

Brain recovery

Dr Yucel says whether that part of the brain in users like Linda can be restored is uncertain.

"We do know that some of these dysfunctions can recover," he said. "Whether it recovers partially or fully in the medium term, we don't know."

"But this is an important area to look at and something we'll hope to do in the next year or two."

Linda is hoping the research can help users find an easier way off drugs.

"It would be absolutely wonderful if the drug companies could find a way to work on this part of the brain to help you say no," she said.

"Because there does become a point where it becomes the line between the habit and then the addiction, and unfortunately we don't know where that line is."

"It's just a big blurred line, so one day you're happily using, the next day you wake up saying 'I need it'."



Muslim helpline launched

Wed Aug 1, 2007

Australia's first Muslim telephone helpline is being launched in Sydney today.

The crisis hotline is part of a pilot project being run by the Muslim health charity Mission of Hope.

Helpline director Hanan Dover says there has long been a need for a crisis line for Muslims staffed by Muslim counsellors.

"They feel more comfortable with accessing Muslim health service providers because of the stigma that's attached to being Muslim," she said.

Ms Dover says while Muslim Australians have the same mental health issues as others, they feel more alienated since events such as Sept 11.

"They don't feel very trustworthy towards a lot of the authority figures, especially considering the latest issue with Doctor Mohamed Haneef," she said.

The helpline will initially cover New South Wales, with some access for other states.



Pregnancy help line 'will be watched'

ABC Online 1 May 2007

Family planning groups say they will monitor the Federal Government's new pregnancy help line carefully to make sure it lives up to its promise of providing unbiased advice to women.

The \$15 million hotline began operating at today and is part of a Federal Government initiative to lower the abortion rate by providing advice to women facing unplanned pregnancies.

Help line counsellors follow a script which ends with a general referral back to the caller's GP or local health service.

But the involvement of Catholic welfare agencies has prompted concerns from pro-choice advocates, such as Dr Leslie Cannon, who says women might not receive impartial counselling.

"Two of the key agencies have some very clear concerns and anxieties and restrictions to their capacities to talk about abortion," she said.

Spokeswoman for Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia, Dr Christine Reed, says she has read the script the hotline

counsellors are using and believes it is non-directive.

"We have been very anxious about pregnancy counselling lines in the past that have not been transparent," she said.

"We will be watching very carefully to see if this is so with this one.

"On the one hand, we're pleased that the Government is putting some money at last into reproductive and sexual health, [but] we want to make sure that it is actually something that's useful for women."

Meanwhile, the Australian Democrats are concerned the new support line may infringe on people's privacy.

Senator Natasha Stott-Despoja says she is uncomfortable that all phone calls will be taped and the recordings kept for up to seven years.

"What happens to that information? How is it stored? How is it kept? Who has access to it?" she said.

"Does the person have access to that information? Can they correct it? When will it be destroyed?"

"[I have] all of those questions and I've been working through those with the company at the moment and I still am awaiting some answers on some of those issues."

The National Pregnancy Support Helpline number is 1800 422 213.



Lung cancer our hidden killer

July 12, 2007 (Daily Telegraph)

LUNG cancer patients are too scared and embarrassed to seek help for their condition because of the stigma of smoking, medical experts have revealed.

As a result, a free helpline will open today, dedicated to lung cancer patients who are suffering in silence.

Despite the disease being the leading cause of cancer deaths in men, celebrities are more inclined to lend their services to high-profile causes such as breast and skin cancer.

Each year, 3000 people are diagnosed with lung cancer.

Cancer Council chief executive officer Dr Andrew Penman said many people believed lung cancer patients did not deserve the same attention as other sufferers.

"Despite its prevalence, lung cancer has poor visibility in the general community compared to cancers like skin, prostate and breast, which have benefited from recent awareness campaigns," Dr Penman said.

"Patients are also likely to see lung cancer as something sufferers have brought on themselves, therefore they tend to live with that in isolation.

"However, not all lung cancer patients are smokers."

The Cancer Council's helpline received 21,000 calls last year, yet only 630 related to lung cancer.

Survivor Mike Hyde, 52, had given up smoking for 17 years before he was diagnosed with lung cancer. He had already nursed his wife, Chris, 61, through breast cancer and believed the disease would not strike twice in one family.

He was shocked when he found there was a lack of information or support for lung cancer patients.

"Compared to my wife, who was diagnosed with breast cancer, there just weren't enough services around," he said.

"All I wanted to do was talk to someone about what was happening to me.

"Predominantly smokers get it but it should be given a much higher profile than it has."

More than 80 per cent of people have advanced lung cancer by the time they are diagnosed.

Doctors believe, with early intervention, 20 per cent of sufferers could live up to five years longer.



Telephone help can spur diet

While some people may need a personal trainer to get fit, a new study suggests that a little health advice over the phone can also do the trick.

In a review of 26 studies on telephone health counselling, Australian researchers found that most showed the tactic to be successful. In more than three-quarters of the studies, phone advice from nurses or other counsellors helped men and women improve their eating and exercise habits.

The findings, published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, "It shows that support for physical activity and dietary change can come from a variety of mechanisms," lead author Dr Elizabeth Eakin, a researcher at the University of Queensland. "This is great news for people who don't want to join a more structured group program or who don't have access." For their study, Eakin and her colleagues reviewed 26 clinical trials conducted since the 1990s that looked at the effects of telephone counselling on adults' diet and exercise routines.

In most studies, the phone advice was part of an overall program that also included

some other type of education, like face-to-face counselling, classes or written materials.

The phone calls were designed to give study participants "real-time" advice, helping them get over hurdles to making lifestyle changes or to set new goals for themselves.

Overall, the review found, 77 per cent of the studies showed that people who received phone counselling made improvements in their eating and exercise habits.

It did take some effort, however; the telephone strategy was most successful when it was paired with face-to-face help, and long-term counselling - more than 6 months - was more effective than short-term help.

Whether people maintain their lifestyle improvements after the phone calls stop is unknown, according to Eakin. The time is right, she and her colleagues say, for phone counselling to be tested in the "real world."

There are already "quit lines" for smokers and telephone services for cancer information, the researchers note, and it is possible to incorporate diet and exercise advice into these programs.



Phone counselling may help drinkers

SMH July 25, 2007

A few phone conversations with a counsellor might help patients who abuse or who are dependent on alcohol cut back on their drinking, at least in the short term, a new study suggests.

Researchers found that after just six telephone sessions with a counsellor, men and women with alcohol problems were able to reduce their drinking.

All of the study participants had their drinking problems identified through screening during a routine visit to the doctor's office. None had been seeking treatment for alcohol abuse.

The findings, say the study authors, suggest that screening and phone-based counselling might help people who otherwise wouldn't have their problem drinking addressed.

"The study shows that we shouldn't just give up on those alcohol-dependent patients who cannot or choose not to get treatment," lead study author Dr Richard L. Brown said in a statement.

"If we can identify these folks in primary care waiting rooms and provide

telephone counselling ... we can start to help many of these patients," he said.

Brown and his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin in Madison report the findings in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*.

The study involved nearly 900 adults with an alcohol disorder who were randomly assigned to one of two groups. The treatment group had telephone sessions with a counsellor to talk about ways to cut back on alcohol; each call was followed by a letter from the counsellor that summarised the conversation.

The comparison group received only a pamphlet on maintaining a healthy lifestyle, which included information on alcohol.

After three months, patients in the counselling group were drinking less, the study found. The men had a statistically significant reduction in total alcohol consumption (17 per cent) and in the number of "risky" drinking days (31 per cent).

Women also reduced their drinking, but the changes were not statistically different from the reductions seen in the women in the comparison group. It's possible, according to Brown's team, that simply being screened for problem drinking spurred many women in the comparison group to cut back.

Experts have called for primary care doctors to routinely screen patients for

alcohol abuse. These findings, according to Brown's team, suggest that when drinking problems are spotted, many patients might benefit from phone counselling.

"Getting patients to participate in the counselling sessions was actually much easier than we thought it would be," Brown said. "Once they had established rapport with that counsellor over the phone, many patients really looked forward to their sessions."

The researchers are now studying whether the drinking improvements last for up to a year.



Howard boosts Lifeline funding

Sep 3, 2007

Prime Minister John Howard has announced \$8.2 million in funding for Lifeline's telephone counselling service over four years.

Mr Howard says the money will help Lifeline answer the growing number of calls it receives.

"What this funding is going to do is to cover the day-to-day operational and technical costs of Lifeline's new national call system,

which is currently being implemented," he said.

"It will mean that calls first of all go to their nearest local centre but if they are busy the call will be answered by the next available telephone counsellor in Australia."

Lifeline Adelaide to divert calls interstate

The operator of the Lifeline counselling service in Adelaide is urging telephone callers to be patient.

Mark Henley, from Uniting Care Wesley, says Lifeline is training 40 more volunteers to help boost its counselling staff.

He says other new measures will include the use of operators interstate. The system will mean that calls are answered more efficiently and that if one centre is totally busy then calls will go through to another centre so that calls are answered more quickly.

"That's the technology that's in the pipeline and we're hoping will be operating by about October this year."

Mr Henley hopes that more people will volunteer to take emergency calls from the public.

"This service has been going for 40 years and we've had strong support from the public with volunteers for all that time, so we're optimistic that people will step forward to volunteer to be part of the Lifeline system," he said.



Epilepsy linked to greater suicide risk

SUFFERERS of epilepsy are three times more likely to commit suicide than the general population, according to a Danish study.

The risk is five times greater for anyone diagnosed within the preceding six months, said an analysis of more than 21,000 cases of suicide, published yesterday in *The Lancet Neurology*.

"Individuals with epilepsy have a higher risk of suicide, even if co-existing psychiatric disease, demographic differences and socio-economic factors are taken into account. Our study identifies people with newly diagnosed epilepsy as a vulnerable group that require special attention."

Mark Cook, professor of neurosurgery at St Vincent's Hospital, said there were almost certainly "some biological links" between depression and epilepsy.

"But the really big issue is still the stigma and social difficulty that surround the diagnosis of epilepsy and its management."

The study found women with the illness were more likely to take their own life than men. The incidence of suicide decreased as sufferers grew older



SANE Calls

RURAL Australians make up 14 per cent of the population, but to SANE Australia's national Helpline, they make twice as many calls as people based in metropolitan areas.

"People living in rural Australia are increasingly calling SANE's Helpline for information, understanding and advice on mental illness," Barbara Hocking, Executive Director of SANE Australia said.

"Over the last two years, approximately one third of all calls to our Helpline were from rural areas."

The SANE Helpline is a confidential service available free of charge to anyone, anywhere in Australia.

Help is also available through the internet via SANE's 'Helpline Online' where users can ask questions about mental illness and related topics.

Contact the SANE Freecall Helpline on 1800 18 SANE (7263); visit www.sane.org; or email helpline@sane.org.



Aidline Victoria Closes.

Three prominent GLBT groups will split the assets of the AIDS, Hepatitis and Sexual Health Line Inc (AHSHL) after the organisation voted unanimously to wind up and appoint a liquidator at a special General Meeting late last month.

The organisation will distribute its remaining assets equally between Positive Women, Straight Arrows and Gay & Lesbian Switchboard. Along with the remaining liquid assets, these groups will also receive valuable intellectual property, such as training materials, policies and information.

Victoria's Department of Human Services (DHS) told AHSHL in February this year that its funding would cease on June 30, as a part of a shift in the provision of health services to reduce redundancy in the sector.

DHS has allocated funds to new information and referral services operated by two other organisations, the Hepatitis C Council and People Living with HIV/AIDS Victoria (PLWHA Victoria).

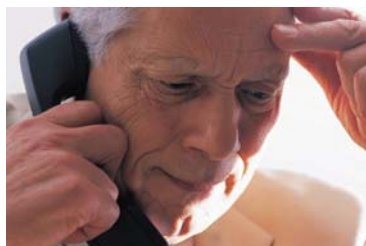
AHSHL was established 22 years ago and provided

comprehensive telephone counselling, information, advice and referral about HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis and Sexual Health. It operated with a pool of over sixty dedicated volunteers.

AHSHL President, Ms Leila Greenfield, agreed that the way to honour the legacy of the organisation and its members was to wind it up in an orderly fashion, ensuring their accumulated knowledge continues to be utilised.

Brett Hayhoe, President of PLWHA Victoria explained the shift.

"PLWHA Victoria was asked if we would take on the [AHSHL telephone] service, and we agreed, but the new line is not a counselling service - the reason for this is that there are a lot of current counselling providers who can do the job admirably," he told *MCV*.



Grim future warning for Western Sydney

June 13, 2007

Tony Trimmingham has stopped plenty of kids from disappearing through the cracks during his 10 years with the Family Drug Support organisation but even he concedes that, without more help, south-west Sydney

faces a grim future.

The bulk of calls to his national helpline service come from individuals and families living in Liverpool, Fairfield and Bankstown seeking help for a range of drug and alcohol issues.

"But I really feel for health services and the Government because, while there is always room for more treatment services, there's not always the means to deliver them where they are needed most."

Mr Trimmingham said the main way to help provide social welfare was to offer family support.

"Support the family and you can help them cope better with individuals within the family unit who have drug and alcohol issues," he said.

"Hopefully, this sense of support then rubs off on the drug user and they can move forward in a more positive manner.

"Essentially it is about management issues. There are lots of problems related to heroin use but managing a user is relatively easy compared to those using amphetamines, particularly ice. Then you can get psychotic episodes and even violence.

"You also can't understate the problems associated with alcohol and the massive increase in binge drinking. A lot of the trouble comes from the pre-mix drinks with teenagers,

particularly girls, getting absolutely smashed on these products. We may end up paying a huge price for this in 10-15 years time."

Mr Trimmingham recently won a tender that has enabled him to establish a youth support website: www.yds.org.au. It includes chat rooms, support information and a national helpline (1300368186).

"Our website asks them questions, organises one-on-one discussions and conducts regular polls on what youths think the drinking age should be and other questions, like pill testing at venues," he said.

The website will be officially launched on Wednesday, June 20, by Cabramatta MP Reba Meagher at NSW Parliament House, during Drug Action Week.

By Daniel de Nardi

If you have Information that you would like published in our newsletter please email us at

info@helplines.org.au



The National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline

The National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline ("the Hotline") provides support and assistance for anyone in Australia reporting allegations of abuse and neglect involving people with disability.

The aim of the Hotline is to stop current instances of abuse and neglect of people with disability and to prevent them from reoccurring.

The Hotline assists people with all types of disability including people with a mental illness. If the abuse occurs in a government funded disability service the Hotline assists by:

- Writing a report outlining the allegations of abuse and neglect which is referred to the government funding body for investigation;
- Providing ongoing support to the caller throughout the notification process;

If the abuse and neglect has not occurred in a government funded disability service the Hotline assists by:

- Providing support and information to the caller;
- Writing a report outlining the allegations of abuse and neglect that will be

forwarded for investigation to an appropriate investigation agency, such as the Health Care Complaints Commission;

- Referring the caller to other services that can assist;

When a person with a disability needs assistance to make a report to the Hotline or would like assistance to attempt to resolve the issue, the Hotline will organise advocacy assistance so that the person's allegations can be reported.

The types of abuse referred to the Hotline include:

- Physical abuse;
- Sexual abuse;
- Psychological abuse;
- Financial abuse;
- Unlawful use or restrictive practices;
- Legal or civil abuse and;
- Systemic abuse.

The types of neglect include:

- Emotional neglect;
- Physical neglect;
- Passive neglect and;
- Wilful deprivation.

For more information about these definitions please refer to the Hotline website www.disabilityhotline.org.

The Hotline follows up when required to find out whether the person is satisfied with the referral and the resolution of their allegations of abuse and neglect.

How to contact the Hotline
The Hotline is open 8am-
8pm, 7 days a week.

Phone: 1800 88 00 52
TTY: 1800 30 10 30
Fax: (02) 9318 1372
Mail: Locked Bag 2705,
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012
Internet:

www.disabilityhotline.org

National Relay Service:
1800 555 677

Telephone Interpreter
Service: 131 450

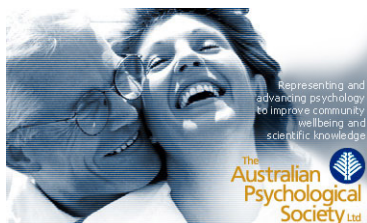


DIARY DATES

SEPTEMBER 2007



26 – 28 September
AGCA Conference
Fremantle WA
Feast for the Mind
www.agca.com.au



22 – 29 September
APS Conference
Brisbane QLD
Psychologists Making and
IMPACT
www.apsconference.com.au

NOVEMBER 2006



21 November
Surfer Paradise
International Helplines
Conference
www.helplines.org.au

DECEMBER 2007



6 December
Helplines Australia AGM
Sydney Counseling Centre
Parramatta
www.helplines.org.au