

Puerperal Psychosis Panel News

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INTRODUCING OUR TEAM

We thought that it would be helpful for panel members to have a brief introduction to the people in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Birmingham who are involved with research into puerperal psychosis and who might be contacting you about research projects.

Professor Ian Brockington has been responsible for developing the Regional Service for pregnancy related mental illness since 1985 and is the head of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Birmingham. He was a founder and first president of the Marcé Society (an international society to advance the understanding, prevention and treatment of mental illness related to pregnancy) and is Chairman of the Section of Womens Mental Health of the World Psychiatric Association. He is the author of "Motherhood and Mental Health" published in 1996 by Oxford University Press and has researched and written numerous articles about pregnancy related psychiatry. He started the Puerperal Psychosis Corresponding Panel .

Professor Nick Craddock has recently moved from the University of Wales in Cardiff to become Professor of Molecular Psychiatry in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Birmingham. His main interest is investigating the molecular (biochemical) changes that occur during mood disorders, including manic depressive illness and puerperal psychosis.

Dr. Monica Doshi is a specialist Registrar who has been working with Professor Brockington as part of her training since December 96. She is particularly interested in puerperal psychosis and is researching this as part of a Masters Degree. The research includes interviewing mothers who have had at least 1 episode of puerperal psychosis and either 1 unaffected pregnancy **or** another episode of psychosis unrelated to pregnancy.

Dr. Abdul Abu Bakar is a Malaysian psychiatrist undertaking a Phd about puerperal psychosis and is responsible for the prophylactic trial of lithium.

Julia Giles(37), a freelance journalist has recently joined the team which is carrying out in-depth interviews with women who have suffered puerperal psychosis .Julia has also been interviewed for the project herself, having suffered puerperal psychosis following the births of her 2 children, Marcus(8) and Josie (4). Following the birth of her daughter, Julia has become very much involved with local mental health services and campaigning in North Lincolnshire. She is chairman of the local branch of MIND, the mental health charity and, through MIND, has published a book containing interviews and poetry inspired by those who suffer from mental illness. She also edits the Northern Region newsletter for the National Schizophrenia Fellowship.

Jackie Benjamin is the co-ordinator of the puerperal psychosis panel. She originally trained and practised as a solicitor in London. She suffered puerperal psychosis after the births of each of her children, Alex born in April 1991 and Archie, born in May 1993. After the children were born she didn't return to paid work, but became active with the National Childbirth Trust.(NCT) She was a member of Hampstead Community Health Council in London and after moving to Birmingham in 1993 became Secretary and subsequently Chairman of the Birmingham West Branch of NCT. It was through NCT that Jackie met Professor Brockington and in September 1995 started working as co-ordinator for the panel. Jackie is also a supporter of the Association for Post-Natal Illness (APNI) and a member of Meet-A-Mum Association(MAMA), MIND and the Marce Society

Jennifer Davies is Professor Brockington's research secretary and will be responsible for much of the administration of the panel. She has a degree in Health Studies and is currently studying for a Masters Degree in Health Promotion.

Molecular Studies

[Professor Nick Craddock](#) and Dr. Ian Jones are carrying out research into the molecular (biochemical) changes that occur during puerperal psychosis.

It is known that changes in brain chemicals (molecules) occur when a person suffers an episode of puerperal psychosis and it is widely believed that these changes are the result of fluctuations in hormones that occur at the time of childbirth. However, these molecular changes are currently not well understood. The purpose of this research project is to identify which molecules are involved and in what ways they change during episodes of puerperal psychosis. It is hoped that this research will lead to a dramatic improvement in our understanding of puerperal psychosis and will lead on to the development of more effective treatment and preventative methods.

Participation in this research will involve volunteers giving a sample of blood and completing a short interview giving details of their medical and family history. Professor Craddock and Dr. Jones are looking for volunteers who have suffered puerperal psychosis to help with this research.

Puerperal Psychosis Interviews

The requirements for this project have undergone some change since the last newsletter. Dr. Doshi, who will be analysing the information from the interviews will be seeking to compare pregnancies which have been affected by puerperal psychosis with pregnancies which have been unaffected. She will also be comparing cases of puerperal psychosis with episodes of psychosis during pregnancy (pre-partum psychosis). We therefore wish to interview :

- women who have had at least 1 episode of puerperal psychosis and at least 1 other unaffected pregnancy **or** another episode of psychosis not related to pregnancy

Lithium Prophylaxis Trial

11 patients have taken part in the lithium prophylaxis trial so far, including 1 from Australia. Initial results look promising. We will need at least 20 more patients to complete the trial. If you are pregnant and have previously suffered puerperal psychosis or manic depression please let us know if you are interested in finding out more about the this trial.

MRI Scans and Neuro-imaging

This project which will involve scanning the brains of women who have suffered puerperal psychosis and comparing the results with scans taken of their sisters who have children and have not been ill. A number of you have already expressed an interest in this project and we will contact you if and when funds are forthcoming.

Menstrual Psychosis

Dr. Neil Deuchar is involved in an international collaborative research effort to study severe menstrual disturbances. Please write to him if you have any personal experiences to relate. He can be contacted at The Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital , Mindelsohn Way, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2QZ

Birmingham Mother & Baby Unit 5th birthday celebrations

The Mother & Baby Psychiatric Unit, at the Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital in Birmingham, celebrated its 5th birthday on Friday 30th May 1997, at the Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham . We were fortunate to have beautiful sunny weather for the occasion giving it a real party atmosphere. We were delighted that about 10 members of the panel attended, along with past patients of the Mother & Baby Unit and interested health professionals.

In the morning there were presentations from those involved with the Mother & Baby Unit about their work and a new video about the work of the Unit was shown.

In the afternoon , those present divided up into smaller groups for discussion.

Some of you who were unable to attend have asked for notes of the meeting. I'm afraid that the whole day was so busy and full of conversations with so many people that I wasn't able to take notes in order to give a detailed account of the proceedings.

There isn't a meeting planned for 1998, but we hope to organise something on a larger scale for 1999. I'll keep you all posted.

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