



'Brain bank' offers hope of schizophrenia cure

The Age

Jill Stark

May 2, 2007

A CURE for schizophrenia could come from a world-first "brain bank" using blood samples and genetic information from thousands of Australian sufferers.

Scientists from around the globe will be able to cross-reference the neurological details of people with the condition after the launch of the \$3.5 million research project yesterday.

Schizophrenia — a severe mental illness that can cause delusions and hallucinations — affects about 285,000 Australians at an estimated economic cost of \$2.5 billion a year.

The Schizophrenia Research Institute is looking for 4000 volunteers, half affected by schizophrenia and half for a control. They will donate blood, have a magnetic resonance brain scan and undergo psychological tests.

The information will be kept at the institute in Sydney but scientists from around Australia will be involved in the initiative, including from the Royal Melbourne Hospital's Institute of Neurological Sciences.

"The task will be to maintain this databank so that scientists can access that cross-linked information and test various theories about schizophrenia in order to identify the genetic underpinning of the condition," said Professor Vaughan Carr, scientific director of the Schizophrenia Research Institute.

"We're aiming to develop potential cures and more effective treatments. We're also hoping to identify people at high risk ... in order to develop potential preventative measures."

Actor Russell Crowe will lend his voice to a national television campaign to recruit volunteers.

Professor Carr said the databank was unlikely to provide a cure for people who currently had schizophrenia, but he expected many sufferers and their families to volunteer.

"Most people will be motivated by a desire to make a difference for future generations of people who would otherwise develop schizophrenia," he said.

"It's a nasty disease associated with life-long disability of varying degrees. It comes on in adolescence and ruins people's career plans and hopes for romance and raising families."

Barbara Hocking, chief executive of SANE Australia, said the database would be helpful.

"There's (also) a lot that could be done to ensure that the treatments we already have are available early enough for people with schizophrenia."

<http://schizophreniaresearch.org.au>

<http://www.sane.org>



Researchers gather schizophrenia clues

2 May 2007

The West Australian

West Australians are being asked to join the world's biggest schizophrenia research bank to try to find out why one in 100 people develop the debilitating brain disease.

The Schizophrenia Research Institute project will recruit 4000 Australians from WA and three other States to provide family history, genetic and brain tissue data to researchers in a bid to see what triggers the disease.

They are seeking people aged 18-60 with schizophrenia as well as those who do not have the mental illness nor any family history of it.

Australia's biggest "brain bank" initiative is expected to play a crucial role in the international search for a schizophrenia cure and the \$3.5 million project will bring together scientists from NSW, Victoria, Queensland and WA.

Those looking to take part in the project should visit www.schizophreniaresearch.org.au

Database to help fight disease

2 May 2007

Geelong Advertiser

SCIENTISTS hope to solve the mysteries of schizophrenia with a world-first plan to collect brain data from thousands of Australian sufferers.

The so-called "brain bank", launched yesterday, will hold the neurological details of 4000 Australians with and without the disease.

The database will be used to come up with much-needed hard information about what sparks the illness to develop new treatments, and maybe even a cure.

"At the moment there's actually a lot known, but relatively little understood, about schizophrenia and that needs to change," said Vaughan Carr from the Schizophrenia Research Institute, which will run the bank.

"And let's face it, although the treatments we have work, they're just not good enough."

Professor Carr said the greatest challenge in the field has been getting access to scientific data from enough sufferers to be able to make statistically robust and reliable conclusions.

The institute has launched an advertising campaign using the voice of Russell Crowe to recruit volunteers for psychological testing, structural brain scans and a blood analysis.

Half will have the condition and the remainder will be healthy to provide a good comparison.

The data will then be linked and made available for researchers studying the genetic or environmental factors that cause the disease.

The \$3.5 million database will be ready for research use from 2010.



Mental illness brain bank

2 May 2007

Townsville Bulletin

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Online:



Brain bank to solve mystery of schizophrenia

AAP

1 May 2007

By Tamara McLean, National Medical Writer

SYDNEY, May 1 AAP - Scientists hope to solve the mysteries of schizophrenia with a world-first plan to collect brain data from thousands of Australian sufferers.

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Prof Carr said while the condition is most commonly passed down through families, it appears it can also be triggered by lifestyle.

Smoking cannabis in adolescence is one factor, and scientists have also found higher rates among immigrants, socially-disadvantaged groups and people living in cities.

"There are a large number of susceptibility genes that we think are involved in various combinations, each of them having some small effect in interacting with the environment to cause the disease," Prof Carr said.

"But this is exactly what we need to find out more about."

The \$3.5 million database, funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council, will be ready for research use from 2010.



Institute seeks volunteers for schizophrenia research

ABC news online

1 May 2007

The Schizophrenia Research Institute at the University of Newcastle is hoping the establishment of a 'brain bank' will lead to a cure for the mental illness.

The institute is asking for volunteers from New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia for the nation's biggest research project into schizophrenia.

The institute's Professor Vaughan Carr says it will involve brain scans on 2,000 people with schizophrenia and 2,000 people without the illness.

"In each case we'll be undertaking systematic interviews and clinical psychological assessments, brain scans to measure the neuro-anatomical structure of the brain in each case," he said.

"Blood will be taken for deposit in a bank for later genetic analysis."

Professor Carr says the project is a big step towards finding a cure.

"We know that it's 80 per cent inheritable, we know that there are several dozen candidate genes, susceptibility genes that are involved," he said.

"But we don't know which ones in which combination in relation to which environmental factors actually produce the disease."



'Brain bank' to help beat schizophrenia

Tuesday May 1 12:49 AEST

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May 1, 2007 - 12:54PM

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1st May 2007, 10:20 WST

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