

Database to boost schizophrenia research

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Schizophrenia research in Australia has been revolutionised, scientists say, as a new database is launched.

The secure internet-based resource provides researchers with a quick way to store and also search through the files - such as brain scans - provided by 4,000 volunteers who have the condition.

It has replaced what Australian Schizophrenia Research Bank manager Dr Carmel Loughland described as a manual and time-consuming filing system.

"This database has revolutionised the way our schizophrenia research data is collected, stored and disseminated in Australia," Dr Loughland said in a statement on Monday.

"Now, scientists can easily input data, tag that data with key words so others can easily find it, and download brain images (or) genetic and clinical information that could help them with their research."

The database was developed by not-for-profit Intersect Australia Ltd, an initiative of NSW-based universities and funded by the NSW government.

The Australian Schizophrenia Research Bank is based at the University of Newcastle.

Chief investigator Professor Rodney Scott said the new database "opens up exciting new possibilities for researchers as we strive to learn more about this condition".

Schizophrenia is a developmental brain condition that typically occurs in one in 100 people.

It is the third leading cause of disability in young people and there is no known cure.

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New help for schizophrenia sufferers

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People with schizophrenia will benefit from a new NSW-designed database that pools the knowledge of researchers and assists in understanding and treating schizophrenia.

Minister for Science and Medical Research Jodi McKay said the Australian Schizophrenia Research Bank database, designed by NSW e-research institute Intersect and researchers at the University of Newcastle, allows for greater collaboration among researchers and health providers across Australia.

"Intersect, working in partnership with researchers from the University of Newcastle, has developed a system that allows specialists to access information as well as upload data that may help someone else treating people on the other side of the nation," Ms McKay said.

"This new database is a comprehensive web portal that replaces several existing sites and databanks and collects a repository of information about schizophrenia in one easy-to-access online resource.

"It provides a multi-layered databank with authorised access to brain scans, genetic information and clinical information that will enhance research and treatment efforts.

"The structure of the research database ensures maximum access while safely and securely protecting the privacy of people with schizophrenia.

"It's an important breakthrough not only for researchers and carers, but for the one in 100 young people who are affected by schizophrenia in Australia."

Ms McKay said it was also an important milestone for Intersect, which incorporates advanced information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance research in a range of areas.

"As a Government that has a focus on innovative science and medical research, we understand the huge value in using advanced ICT to support research endeavours," Ms McKay said.

"We provided more than \$2.8 million to help Intersect get off the ground.

"It is initiatives such as this database, which will translate research into health care, that help us achieve the NSW Government's goal of being Australia's clever State and endorses our commitment to bolster our knowledge sector.

"The NSW Government has committed more than \$33 million to the State's knowledge sector in 2009-10 alone. That investment is being rewarded with positive contributions such as this new database for the research sector that ultimately benefits the people of Australia."

Ms McKay said the NSW Government provides around \$2.5 million a year to the Schizophrenia Research Institute to support schizophrenia research and treatment

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New technology to fast-track schizophrenia research

Monday 15 February 2010

A new database to be launched today will provide schizophrenia researchers across Australia with access to new information to help them treat the condition.

The database, developed by eResearch company Intersect, will be used by the Australian Schizophrenia Research Bank (the Bank) and accessed by researchers around the country.

The Bank is managed by the Schizophrenia Research Institute's University of Newcastle group and collects genetic, clinical and neurological information from up to 4,000 volunteers across Australia.

Currently, accessing information stored in the Bank is a manual, time-consuming process. The new database will allow researchers to enter and retrieve data via a high security web portal.

"This database has revolutionised the way our schizophrenia research data is collected, stored and disseminated in Australia," Australian Schizophrenia Research Bank Manager, Dr Carmel Loughland, said.

"Now, scientists can easily input data; 'tag' that data with keywords so that others can easily find it; and download brain images, genetic and clinical information that could help them with their research.

"This database is a major investment in the storage, analysis and sharing of schizophrenia-related information."

Schizophrenia is a developmental brain condition that typically occurs in one in 100 people. It is the third leading cause of disability in young people and there is no known cure.

Professor Rodney Scott from the University of Newcastle, a Chief Investigator of the Bank, said the new database would enable new types of research into schizophrenia.

"This database allows scientists to share more information than ever before and opens up exciting new possibilities for researchers as we strive to learn more about this condition."

Intersect was formed by NSW universities to advance computing technologies for researchers.

Health and medical researchers at the University of Newcastle work in collaboration with the Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI). HMRI is a partnership between the University of Newcastle, Hunter New England Health and the community.



Launching the Australian Schizophrenia Research Bank were: Professor Mike Calford, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), University of Newcastle; Professor Mark Wainwright, Chair of Intersect; Professor Vaughan Carr, CEO of the Schizophrenia Research Institute; NSW Minister for Science and Medical Research, Hon Jodi McKay MP; Dr Carmel Loughland, Manager, Australian Schizophrenia Research Bank; Professor Nicholas Saunders, Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle; and Dr Ian Gibson, Intersect CEO.



The NSW Minister for Science and Medical Research Jodi McKay will launch the new database at 10am today in the Purdue Room, Great Hall, the University of Newcastle, Callaghan campus. Representatives of the Schizophrenia Research Institute, Intersect and the University of Newcastle will be available at the launch.

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