

RECENT EVENTS

Opening of the Behavioural Phenotyping Unit

March 10th was a big day for neuroscience at the University of Otago. Several years of planning by departments and research teams have finally come to fruition with the opening of the Behavioural Phenotyping Unit in Hercus.



Professors Cliff Abraham and Dave Grattan at the front door.

The new animal research quarters are animal friendly and include the latest in animal caging design, lighting to accommodate testing under both day and night conditions, the latest in ventilation systems, and video set ups.



Professor Helen Nicholson, Dean of the School of Medical Sciences, welcomed everyone to the opening (left). Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research, Professor Harlene Hayne officially opened the BPU with tales of an overflowing Morris water maze as a post-doc at Princeton (right).

The BPU will allow Otago neuroscientists to test animal models of disease and trial new therapeutic approaches with greater ease, whilst encouraging collaboration between students and research labs. The BPU is being managed by a Scientific Committee, chaired by Associate Professor Ian McLennan.



Associate Professor Ian McLennan and special guest, Stuart Little, make a point at the opening of the BPU.

Public Lecture by Tony West: *Discovering Novel Treatments for Parkinson's Disease*



Profiles in neuroscience, Professor Cliff Abraham and Associate Professors John Reynolds and Tony West taking questions from the audience.

On February 10th, co-sponsored by the Neurological Foundation and the BHRC, Associate Professor Anthony West (Department of Neuroscience at the Chicago Medical School) spoke to the public about his research to find better treatments for Parkinson's disease by targeting proteins inside the cell. Dr West's collaborator, Dr Kuei Y. Tseng was also in attendance. The talk included videos of rats regaining near normal movement following treatment based on their research. The St David Lecture Theatre crowd was near capacity and there were many questions following the talk. Thanks to Dr Nick Cutfield for fielding most of the audience's clinical questions.

Brain Day 2011

On Saturday March 19th, our annual symposium for the public, Brain Day, was held at Castle Theatre. Sponsored by the Neurological Foundation of New Zealand as part of Brain Awareness Week, there were EEG readings, anatomical models from the medical library and booths representing community groups such as the Stroke Foundation, Alzheimer's NZ and Neurological Foundation.



Kate Sprecher wires up a somewhat wary member of the public to the EEG.



Dr Ruth Empson describes brain structure to Eve Hermansson-Webb, a Channel 9 reporter (and Psychology PhD candidate).

A big thank you to our speakers, organizers Ruth Empson, Jill Leichter, Sue Giddens (NFNZ) and all the student volunteers who wore the bright green "Ask a neuroscientist" T-shirts with pride: Kate Sprecher, Raghavendra Nagaraja, Simon Stringer, Malinda Tantarigama, Yeri Kim, Christopher Roome, Samantha Jane Groves, Victoria Scott; Kajsa Igelstrom, Natalie Wyatt, Dave Bergin, Jenny Clarkson, Rachel Cheong, Stephanie Constantin, Helen Tsui, Mohamed Rizwan and Chew-Ling Tan.



We welcome our new sponsor, Roche.



Community groups provided information about a wide variety of neurological diseases and disorders.

The BHRC Young Investigator Seminar: Andrew Clarkson, *The Stroked Brain, Finding Protectors and Repairers*

The first of four 2011 BHRC lectures was held on March 3 at Barnett Theatre. The honour for the Young Investigator Lecture featuring a researcher early in his/her career was given to Dr Andrew Clarkson. Congratulations!



Professor Cliff Abraham presents Dr Andrew Clarkson with a certificate from the BHRC.

Brain Bee, 2010

The Australian Brain Bee Challenge (ABBC) inspires students to pursue careers in neuroscience research. Brain Bee Round 1 was an online quiz, and Round 2, a regional quiz, led finalists to Round 3 at the February ANS conference in Auckland. ANS president Sarah Dunlop and Professor Perry Bartlett (QBI) presided over a "nail biting" contest between ten finalists. Our NZ and overall Australasian champion, Rachel Wiltshire, is now flying to Florence, Italy for the International Brain Bee Competition later this year. The South Island finalist, Kerstin McEwan, came a close second overall in Australasia. Round 1 for the 2011 competition was held the second week of March, with 120 students from 14 schools around the South Island participating.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

27 April: BHRC Postgraduate Retreat

Melissa Barry, Christopher Roome and Owen Jones are organizing a postgrad retreat for Masters and PhD students of the BHRC at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. This is an opportunity to meet other students with similar interests and to hear speakers from within the BHRC and the wider university cover a wide variety of topics:

- BHRC funding (travel grants)
- Neuroscience labs at Otago and lab techniques
- Writing and presentation tips
- Life after your thesis, the post doc experience and other career avenues

The BHRC will provide morning and afternoon tea and lunch. Time, venue, final programme and registration/contact details will be distributed soon.

25 May: BHRC Clinical Issues Seminar, Dr John Mottershead: *The Biology of Multiple Sclerosis*

The second seminar of our 2011 series will be held on Wednesday May 25th at Barnett Theatre, Dunedin Hospital during the medical forum time slot at 1 pm. The talk will be brief to leave maximum time for discussion, and the time and location have been selected to encourage a dialogue between clinicians and researchers. Do plan to attend this exciting new seminar format. Details to follow closer to the date.

8 July: BHRC Conference

Dr Louise Parr-Brownlie and Dr Margaret Ryan are organizing a one day conference for BHRC members to be held on Friday the 8th of July. Details to follow.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Associate Professor John Reynolds

Our BHRC Deputy Director, Dr John Reynolds, has been promoted to Associate Professor in the Department of Anatomy and Structural Biology.

Paper published in *Synapse*

Congratulations to Dr Beulah Leitch, and co-authors Olga Shevtsova, Dave Bergin and Dr Ping Liu on their article *Spatial learning-induced increase in agmatine levels at hippocampal CA1 synapses* which appeared in the February issue of *Synapse*.

Principal Investigator, Professor Bob Knight

Please welcome our newest PI, Professor Bob Knight from the Department of Psychology. Bob works in clinical neuropsychology studying the assessment and rehabilitation of persons with acquired cognitive deficits.

Pittsburgh Steals One of our Own

Melissa Berry, PhD in the Reynold's lab, will be leaving at the end of April for a post-doc position at the Center for the Neural Basis of Cognition at University of Pittsburgh. Melissa has been a keen organizer for the Brain Bee, the post-grad retreat, and other events and her legacy will live on in the neuroscience T-shirts she helped produce. She will be missed but we wish her well.

Bequest

The BHRC has been the recent recipient of a very generous bequest from the estate of the late Mr Robert Hughes, from Westland. We are humbled by this unsolicited donation of \$25,000 to assist the research efforts of our Centre. The Management Committee will be considering carefully how best to utilise these funds.

BHRC Brochure, Website, and Email address

A brand new BHRC brochure is now available! We will be sending copies to academic staff for distribution amongst their labs, and if more are required, please contact Jill Leichter. Our web address has changed to www.otago.ac.nz/bhrc and is being updated, but we are also working on a brand new website which will hopefully be up and running in the next couple of months. We also have new email address: bhrc@otago.ac.nz

FROM THE DIRECTOR

The BHRC Committee

I am very grateful for the efforts of the BHRC management committee, which provides strategic direction to the Centre and oversees its various activities. The committee currently consists of Cliff Abraham (Director), John Reynolds (Deputy Director), Paul Smith, Liz Franz, Ruth Empson (Brain Day), Louise Parr-Brownlie (Conference), Nick Cutfield (clinical liaison), Margaret Ryan (PDF/RF rep), Richard Farquhar (Community rep, NFNZ), and Jill Leichter (Admin Assistant). The committee to date has been appointed by the Director, with no formal periods of service. However, there has been a gradual turnover of the members, and this will no doubt continue in the future. The Centre's success relies on the Committee's hard work, and of course the support given by the rest of the Centre. A big thumbs up to you all!

Cliff Abraham

News items? Email addresses?

If you have any BHRC related news, new students to add to our mailing list, or announcements, please contact Jill Leichter, jleichter@psy.otago.ac.nz.