



# QSRF

Queensland  
Schizophrenia  
Research  
Foundation

# NEWSLETTER

Supporting life-changing research into  
schizophrenia and bipolar disorder

September 2009

Volume 2, issue 1

## Youth Mental Health Matters Public Forum

On 21 May, the QSRF and the Mental Illness Fellowship of Queensland (MIFQ) held a Public Forum to mark Schizophrenia Awareness Week (SAW) 2009. The Forum took place at the Education Centre, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital (RBWH).



Dr Aaron Groves

Representing The Hon Paul Lucas, Deputy Premier and Minister for Health, Dr Aaron Groves, (QLD Mental Health Director) opened the Forum. Dr Groves highlighted findings from the recent National Mental Health Survey, which shows one in two Australians suffer a mental disorder sometime in their life. The Opposition Spokesperson, The Hon Mark McArdle, drew attention to the impact of mental disorder on families and stressed the central role of the General Practitioner in providing early assistance.



Dr David Morris (UK), Mr Ken Meissner and  
Dr Wayne Clarke (MIFQ)

Kerry Lonergan, ABC Journalist for Landline, facilitated a highly informative panel discussion on youth mental health. The panel was made up of carers, consumers, medical and education professionals, police, researchers and policy advisors.

A hypothetical teenage drug abuse scenario was workshopped by the panel to identify ways to promote early intervention, and as a result, the scenario and its outcomes received very positive feedback. The panel discussion will be developed into an online resource to help parents, teachers and young people experiencing difficulties.

Mr Ken Meissner, MIFQ President, introduced SAW International Speaker, Dr David Morris, Director of the UK Government's Social Inclusion Programme. His experience in the UK suggested that it is only possible to overcome entrenched marginalisation of people with serious mental illness with solid Government backing and intensive community development work.

The QSRF would like to acknowledge all the speakers, stall holders and volunteers for their dedicated support. The QSRF gives a special thanks to Lauren Davies (see next page) for her management of the event, which drew over one hundred attendees.

Keynote Forum presentations can be found at [www.qsrf.com.au](http://www.qsrf.com.au).



Panel discussion

## A young person's perspective

One of the young panellists from the Youth Public Forum, Pamela Siebrecht, Consumer and Carer Participation Officer and a member of the Beautiful Minds: Youth Advisory Group within the Institute of Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS), shared her story from both a personal and professional point of view.

When talking about young people's experience of their first contact with mental health services, Pamela agreed with panel members that the initial rapport between patient and psychiatrist can be a make or break stage for a young person. The initial assessment is confronting and although young people may be aware of some of the issues or difficulties they are experiencing, they may not comprehend the underlying emotional or mental health issues they are dealing with. We just don't discuss them in society.

An unwell young person may be fearful and confused; even the label *psychiatrist* is scary. Young people under 16 years of age can be aware that both psychiatrists and parents have control over their lives - be it the ability to hospitalise or medicate. So, the sense of power imbalance can be threatening and a young

person will no doubt as a result be defensive and withdrawn.

Pamela also mentioned that we must remember that a psychiatric assessment involves challenging concepts and questions a young person may never have been exposed to before.

She highlighted that young people's conceptualisation of mental illness may be entirely formed by media reports, and we know that what we see on the news is often ill-informed or misleading - usually stigmatising those affected.

Pamela said that more accessible health services designed specifically for young people will make early help-seeking more likely.

Ms Lauren Davies and  
Ms Pamela Siebrecht



## A little bit of Obama comes to Brisbane

On 19 June, we were honoured to hear advisor to the US President, Dr Lesley Russell, speak at the University of Queensland (UQ) en route to taking up a visiting fellowship on health care issues with the Center for American Progress – the leading US policy think tank.

Dr Russell said that despite its prevalence, ignorance about mental health and discrimination is all too common.

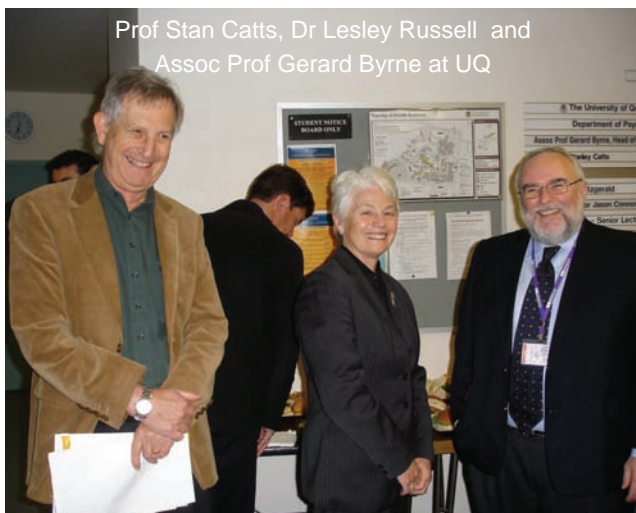
*“If government and business and indeed the general population understood the true impact of mental health on people's lives and the economy, then perhaps we might see some action.”*

*“Sadly, the biggest burden is borne by young people and their families.”*

She summarized the Government's strategies and action plans over the last 15 years, and in her words it was a *“sobering compilation”*.

Dr Russell highlighted the lack of evaluation of Australian Government policy. Despite an increase in the national mental health budget of \$1.9 billion, there is no evidence that the number of people with mental disorder who never seek treatment (over 60% of cases) has gone down. In particular, elderly patients with mental illness and those with chronic complex mental disorders have been failed by the new Federal programmes.

For real change, mental health will have to take a central place on the health reform agenda, something Dr Russell has worked for many years to achieve.



# Mindcare and the QSRF— Come and support our gala cocktail party

On World Mental Health Day, 10 October 2009, Mindcare and the QSRF will co-host their annual cocktail evening at Austral Motors in Fortitude Valley. We aim to raise funds for the building of a much-needed Youth Mental Health Centre in Queensland, and for the continued support to those directly affected by mental illness.

You can find the event details at [http://www.qsrf.com.au/events/invitation\\_qsrf.html](http://www.qsrf.com.au/events/invitation_qsrf.html), or search for 'Mindcare' in Facebook's events section. We encourage you to share the invitation with family, friends and colleagues. This evening of gastronomy and entertainment promises to be a fun and worthwhile night out. Tickets are only \$80, so come and support our gala cocktail party.

The evening is proudly sponsored by Austral Motors, Farmout, Property Solutions Group, Shingle Inn, UBS, ViciBio and Vietdelites. We would like to thank all the sponsors for their dedication and support.

For more information and to book your spot, please contact, Sue Cameron at [mindcareltd@gmail.com](mailto:mindcareltd@gmail.com).

**MINDCARE-QSRF Partnership**  
Working together for change



Mindcare supports organisations concerned with the causes, diagnosis, prevention and treatment of mental illness, and the promotion of mental health, through fundraising activities and generous donations received.

The QSRF is a public fund supporting Queensland research groups targeting early, more effective treatment of psychotic disorders in young people.

Through their continued support of the QSRF, Mindcare has generously donated over \$20,000 towards supporting a University of Queensland PhD to instigate cutting edge clinical research to improve the outcomes of young people living with major depression and bipolar disorder, and a project to analyse carer and consumer experience during first episode psychosis.

## Research update - Brain scans for Schizophrenia?

Due to the complexity and variety of causes and presentations of mental disorder, psychiatrists don't have tests that can be used to diagnose mental illness in the early 'prodromal' stage. However, some promising developments in the area of schizophrenia diagnosis have recently been reported in the Archives of General Psychiatry<sup>1</sup>.

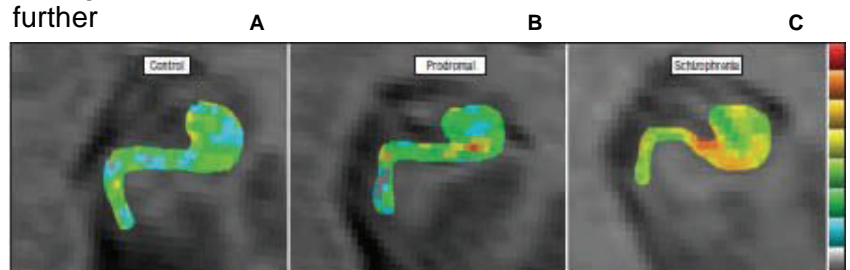
In a small study of 54 subjects, scientists found that a 50% increase of activity in a small area of the hippocampus called the CA1 subfield, has a 71% chance of predicting whether patients showing prodromal signs of illness will progress to definitive schizophrenia.

This promising finding may be useful for identifying patients showing the first reversible signs of schizophrenia, but not yet showing irreversible effects of the disorder - and further studies are urgently needed.

fMRI scans show schizophrenia patients (C) and prodromal patients who later develop the illness (B) have higher resting activity levels (orange - red) in the CA1 subfield of the hippocampus than do healthy subjects (A)

The mean age of subjects showing early symptoms was 19 years, and according to Professor Stan Catts of the University of Queensland, "Although the findings of this preliminary study are a significant development in the field, we must continue to discover more precise and novel approaches to assess adolescents at an even younger age when they first show signs of difficulties".

The QSRF aims to reduce the enormous burden of chronic mental disorders by establishing a Youth Mental Health Research Centre, which will offer best practice assessment and follow up in a youth-friendly environment, and will build an unique and intensive research effort around this service platform.



<sup>1</sup>Schobel, SA et al. Arch Gen Psychiatry 2009; 66:(9) 938-946

## How can you help?

Friend of the QSRF, Ms Georgia Limmer, and her organisation, The Pharmacy Guild of Australia held a series of free dress for donation Fridays during September for the QSRF. The Guild wishes to firstly raise awareness of the QSRF's work to staff members and then to their wider membership.

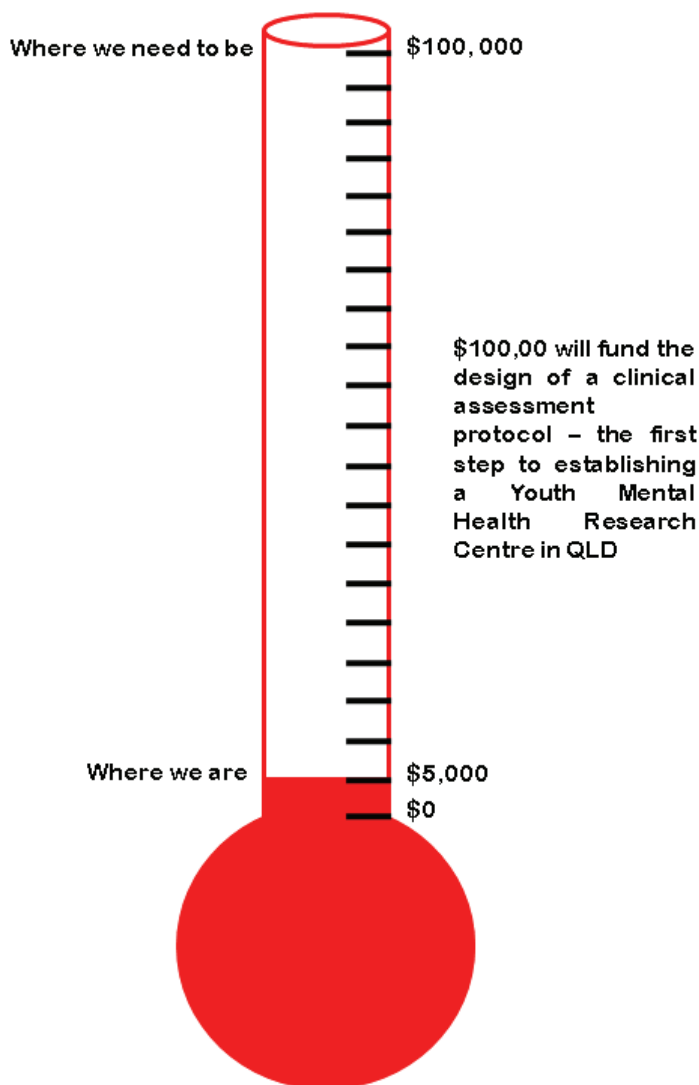
We would like to thank Georgia and her colleagues for their efforts.

You don't have to hold a large corporate or public event to help the QSRF. Enthusiasm and creativity is all that's required.

For example, you could arrange:

- a cupcake day
- a fancy dress party
- a garage sale

...but most importantly - have fun!



## We need you

The QSRF is always on the lookout for volunteers. If you have expertise in web design, particularly DreamWeaver/html, then we would like to hear from you.

If you have these or any other skills to offer, such as administrative, events or fundraising, and you can spare us a little time each week, please get in touch by emailing [admin@qsr.com.au](mailto:admin@qsr.com.au).



**Please help us in our mission to establish a Youth Mental Health Centre by sending your tax-deductible donation to PO Box 951 SPRING HILL QLD 4004.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

email: \_\_\_\_\_

Cheque enclosed made out to Queensland Schizophrenia Research Foundation for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I would be interested in talking with you about the type of research we wish our donation to support Y/N

Please keep me informed by email and/or post about the work of the foundation Y/N

The QSRF is committed to the protection of your personal information. Any information you provide is held by the QSRF for the express purpose of carrying out its mission to prevent and reduce chronic mental disorders through life-changing research. From time-to-time we collaborate with other mental health organisations and may share contact lists to keep you informed of any collaborative projects or events. Please contact us at [admin@qsr.com.au](mailto:admin@qsr.com.au) if you do not wish for us to share this information.

