



## Healing Emotions Saves Health-care Dollars

The Centre for Emotions and Health celebrated its first anniversary in August. Dr. Allan Abbass, associate professor of psychiatry and founder of the centre, says that in its first year, the centre has assessed almost 200 patients and completed treatment of 84, using an emotion-focused brief psychotherapy modality. This treatment, called intensive short-term dynamic psychotherapy, helps the patient identify emotions and undo the many symptoms and behavioral problems caused by blocked emotions. Problems treated include depression, anxiety disorders, somatization, and personality disorders.

Most of the 84 patients had already tried medication or another form of counseling, but without success. Each patient was treated for an average of nine one-hour sessions. Everyone filled out pre- and post-therapy rating scales. After treatment, patients' symptoms and interpersonal problems had improved significantly. Thirty were able to return to work after being on disability for an average of two years; 37 prescriptions were discontinued; and five people stopped using alcohol daily.

Dr. Abbass and his team reported the program saved money in the health care and social system through reduced disability and medication costs. Patients had very few emergency visits and hospital days for any cause in follow-up. Formal data analysis is pending. The estimated minimum cost reduction after the program was \$70,000 per month. The program itself costs less than \$20,000 per month, which means it saves the system 3.5 times more than it costs. As for patients, Dr. Abbass says, "Patients' reports of fewer symptoms, improved relationships, and increased ability to function make this

program more than worthwhile, even if it didn't save any money."

The centre has been productive, providing more than 700 hours of education to more than 300 professionals, publishing nine articles and making 12 research presentations. Three of the key articles reviewed the cost effectiveness of the treatment model used here and how it is taught. The program has been attracting media attention: it has made two television appearances, been on two radio talk shows, and appeared in several print publications.

"What is becoming inescapably clear," says Dr. Abbass, "is that emotion-based disorders are the major burden on our society. When emotion dysfunction is directly addressed with therapies like ours, patients are indistinguishable from normals on any measure, including health care costs and social costs."

The centre is focusing on securing a steady funding base so it can provide education, conduct collaborative research and provide clinical services, always with the aim of further reducing health-care utilization and disability costs, says Dr. Abbass. - Jan Matthews

## A New Resource for Researchers

A committee has been formed to support research in the Capital District mental health program. Two clinical nurse specialists are involved, along with a psychologist, a pharmacist conducting research, and representatives from forensics and addictions. The group will serve as a resource for research information; provide a forum for discussing research-related concerns; help people and groups overcome barriers to conducting research; identify program needs related to the process, dissemination and utilization of research; identify education needs related to conducting research; and liaise with academic affairs and other groups.

Anyone doing research or interested in learning more about the process is welcome to join. For more information or to be placed on the e-mail list, please contact Karen Chaisson at 464-3173. - JM

## Janssen Chair Gets a \$100K Boost

Dr. Ben Rusak, head of research in the department of psychiatry, recently joined Dr. Harold Cook, interim dean of the faculty of medicine, in accepting a six-foot-long cheque for \$100,000, from the Nova Scotia Mental Health Foundation (formerly the Nova Scotia Hospital Foundation). This is the latest in the foundation's annual contributions to support the Dr. Paul Janssen Research Chair in Psychotic Disorders. The foundation will contribute a total of \$500,000, complementing other major contributions made by Dr. Janssen of

Janssen Pharmaceutica and the Dalhousie University faculty of medicine.

Discussions are currently underway with a candidate for the chair position. Dr. Rusak hopes that discussions will be finalized soon and that an announcement of the appointee can be made in early 2004. The incumbent will be expected to lead a major research program in psychotic disorders and their treatment.

On a sad note: Dr. Paul Janssen, whose generous gift made this chair possible, passed away suddenly on Nov. 11, 2003. Dr. Janssen was an international leader in the development of drugs for the treatment of psychiatric and many other disorders for more than half a century. - JM