OVERVIEW OF 2010 ISSDP CONFERENCE FOR ADDICTION

The fourth conference of the International Society for the Study of Drug Policy (ISSDP) was held on 15-16 March 2010 at the RAND headquarters in Santa Monica, California, USA. The conference brought together a multi-disciplinary field of researchers, advocates, policy advisors and students from over 25 countries, and led to often lively debate about optimum policies and methodological approaches to studying drug policies/policy impacts.

The program was diverse and included sessions on the impacts of economic recession on the drug phenomena, violence and the war on drugs in producer countries, research needs for policy making and a roundtable on improving indicators for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

The international tone for the conference was set by 4 high-level keynote speakers that included Dr Keith Humphreys, senior policy advisor to the White House Drug Policy Branch, and Dr Antonia Maria Costa, executive director to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The conference foresaw change in both US and international drug policy towards more consideration of human rights and less absolute reliance on punishment.

A particular strength of the conference has been the creation of a space for critical thought and debate on what is often a difficult area to study. Since its inception there have been clear advances in the conceptualisation of drug policies. Two new lessons were the increasing need to consider the impacts of drug policies beyond national borders, especially how nations can mitigate the unintended consequences of demand-driven countries (e.g. USA on their Mexican and Colombian neighbours), and the need to develop better comparators, whether it be other nations or regions, to determine impacts in the absence of particular policies. A more contentious issue raised was the extent to which national drug strategy evaluations and government funded research in general co-opt drug policy researchers into reinforcing the status quo. The conference once again reinforced the need for forums such as ISSDP that bring together researchers and policy makers to enable critical analysis and interchange about drug policy, drug policy analysis and future directions for quality improvement.

The full program of the 2010 conference is available from the ISSDP website: www.issdp.org.

CONSORT 2010 STATEMENT: UPDATED GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING PARALLEL GROUP RANDOMISED TRIALS

The CONSORT Group (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) has published CONSORT 2010, which provides newly-updated guidance to improve the reporting of trial findings. The first CONSORT statement was published in 1996 and revised in 2001. It includes a checklist to help authors write reports of randomized controlled trials so that others can judge the reliability and validity of the results. The latest version, CONSORT 2010, improves the specificity and clarity of the previous checklist. Several new items will also make it easier for decision makers to judge the soundness of trial results. The publication of CONSORT 2010 now makes the previous version, CONSORT 2001 Statement, out-dated. Authors, editors, reviewers and readers are recommended to refer to this most up-to-date version when writing or interpreting reports of clinical trials.

More than 400 journals and three leading editorial groups across the world have now given their official support to CONSORT.

Source: http://www.consort-statement.org/now-published-consort-2010-statement

STUDY SHOWS COMPULSIVE EATING SHARES ADDICTIVE BIOCHEMICAL MECHANISM WITH COCAINE AND HEROIN ABUSE

In a study recently published in Nature Neuroscience, scientists have shown for the first time that the same molecular mechanisms that drive people into drug addiction lie behind the compulsion to overeat, pushing people into obesity. The study explains what happens in the brains of rats when they have easy access to high-calorie, high-fat food. In rat models, the development of obesity coincides with a progressively deteriorating chemical balance in reward brain circuitries. As these pleasure centres in the brain become less and less responsive, rats quickly develop compulsive overeating habits and become obese. The same changes occur in the brains of rats that over consume cocaine or heroin, and are

Overview provided by Dr Caitlin Hughes, Drug Policy Modelling Program, UNSW, Australia.
thought to play an important role in the development of compulsive drug use. These findings confirm that over-consumption of highly pleasurable food triggers addiction-like neuroadaptive responses in brain reward circuitries, driving the development of compulsive eating. Common mechanisms may therefore underlie both obesity and drug addiction.


MEPHEDRONE BANNED IN UK

Mephedrone, the ‘legal high’ that has become a popular street drug, was classed as an illegal drug in the UK from April 2010. The ban on mephedrone came despite the resignation of two members of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD).

In his resignation letter, ACMD member Eric Carlin said the decision to ban the drug was made despite there being ‘little or no discussion about how our recommendation to classify this drug would be likely to impact on young people’s behaviour’.

Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8616758.stm

REPORT INTO UK GOVERNMENT’S PROGRESS ON THE HAZARDOUS USE OF TOBACCO, ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) has published an assessment of the UK government’s progress in addressing young people’s hazardous use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. Pathways to Problems 2009 considers the implementation of recommendations made in the ACMD’s original Pathways to Problems report published in 2006. The report finds that whilst some progress has been made in areas such as an increase in alcohol duty by two per cent above inflation and an increase in cider duty rates by 10% above inflation, there is clearly still work to be done in this crucial area of exposure to and use of alcohol by young people. In particular, the ACMD calls for further action on minimum-price legislation to stop supermarkets selling alcohol at heavily discounted prices, implementation of a Licensing Act Review, reduction of the blood alcohol concentration level for drivers under the age of 25 years, tax on drinks according to alcoholic strength, and a stricter code for alcohol advertising and sponsorship. The ACMD also reiterates its call for an equivalent independent expert body to advise on the misuse of alcohol and tobacco and ensure that the government receives the best possible advice in this area.

These recommendations come at the same time as new figures released by the UK Department of Health report that the rate of hospital admissions for alcohol-related harm increased by around 70% between 2002/03 and 2008/09, rising from 925 admissions per 100 000 population to 1 583 admissions per 100 000 population.

Sources:
ACMD press release: http://nds.coi.gov.uk/content/detail.aspx?NewsAreaId=2&ReleaseID=412792&SubjectId=2

ONTARIO, CANADA: STUDY FINDS INCREASE IN SMOKING RELATED DISEASE

A study published in the Archives of Internal Medicine shows that in Ontario, Canada the prevalence of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) jumped 64.8% between 1996 and 2007. Adjusted for population growth and other demographic changes over time, the relative increase is 23%. The authors report that the numbers are likely similar across Canada. The biggest increases in COPD diagnoses over time have been among women. Smoking became more socially acceptable for females in the 1950s and ’60s, and the results are now showing up in pulmonary disease. The study also contains some hopeful numbers. While actual cases of COPD have gone up, mortality rates are going down as treatment improves for COPD and related sicknesses that often worsen the patient’s condition.


POLAND: SMOKING BAN IN PUBLIC PLACES FAILS

The British Medical Journal reports that an attempt to impose a complete ban on smoking in public places in Poland failed when its Senate approved a bill allowing smoking in bars and restaurants that have more than one room, as long as a no smoking room is provided, and in hotels and student accommodation.
According to Lukasz Balwicki, of the Department of Public Health and Social Medicine at the Medical University of Gdask, the tobacco lobby had worked hard against a comprehensive ban on smoking in public. ‘The tobacco industry tried to convince [the government] that new stronger regulations would lower revenue coming from tobacco taxes. In times of a financial downturn this is a strong argument,’ Dr Balwicki said.

Poland had ratified the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in 2006 and for the past three years had been debating a more comprehensive public smoking ban. Recent legislation moves Poland towards a more industry-favourable stance and represents a step backward from current Polish law approved in 1995, which bans smoking in hospitals, schools, and workplaces.


NEW ZEALAND: SMOKING NUMBERS DROP

According to the New Zealand Ministry of Health’s 2009 Tobacco Use Survey, the smoking rate for New Zealanders aged between 15 and 64 years was 21.8%, down from 23.9% in 2008. The 2009 youth smoking rate was also lower, at 18.0% compared to 2008’s figure of 20.8%. In New Zealand, one percentage point drop in smoking represents about 30 000 fewer smokers. The figures reportedly represent the biggest drop in smoking rates for a decade. The full report on the 2009 Tobacco Use Survey is planned for release in October 2010.


AFGHANISTAN IS WORLD’S BIGGEST HASHISH PRODUCER

The first ever UNODC report on cannabis in Afghanistan has found that the world’s biggest producer of opium is also a major producer of cannabis. The survey estimates that between 10 000 and 24 000 hectares of cannabis plant are grown in Afghanistan every year. The survey is based on data from 1634 villages in 20 provinces. It shows that there is large-scale cannabis plant cultivation in half of Afghanistan’s provinces. The gross income gained per hectare of cannabis plant (US$ 3900) is higher than that of opium poppy (US$ 3600). The study also found that it is three times cheaper to cultivate a hectare of cannabis plant than a hectare of opium poppy. As a result, the net income of a hectare of cannabis plant is US$ 3341 compared to US$ 2005 per hectare of opium poppy, although opium poppy is still favoured over cannabis plant among Afghan farmers because of the greater water requirements of the cannabis crop.


CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

36th Annual Alcohol Epidemiology Symposium of the Kettil Bruun Society, 31 May–4 June 2010, Lausanne, Switzerland. Website: http://www.kbs2010.ch/

The Society for Prevention Research (SPR) 18th Annual Meeting: Cells to Society: Prevention at All Levels, 1–4 June 2010, Denver, Colorado, USA. The International Program and the Prevention Research Branch of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) will host the 3rd Annual NIDA International SPR Poster Session at this event. Website: http://www.preventionresearch.org/meeting.php

Collegium Internationale Neuro-Psychopharmacologicum (CINP) 2010 World Congress, 6–10 June 2010, Hong Kong, China. Website: http://www.cinp2010.com


The International AIDS Society’s 18th International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2010), 18–23 July 2010, Vienna, Austria. Website: http://www.aids2010.org/

Translational Research in Methamphetamine Addiction Conference, 19–21 July 2010, Chico Hot Springs and Day Spa, Pray, Montana, USA. Website: http://academicdepartments.musc.edu/neurosciences/TRMA2010/


The International Society of Addiction Medicine 12th Annual Meeting, 4–7 October 2010, University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan, Italy. Website: http://www.isam2010.medicina.unimib.it/


Association for Medical Education and Research in Substance Abuse (AMERSA) 34th Annual National Conference, 4–6 November 2010, Bethesda, Maryland, USA. Website: www.amersa.org, or contact Doreen Baeder at doreen@amersa.org

American Public Health Association Annual Meeting and Exposition, 6–10 November 2010, Denver, Colorado, USA. Website: http://www.apha.org/meetings/


Society for Neuroscience Annual Meeting, 13–17 November, San Diego, California, USA. Website: http://www.sfn.org/am2010/


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