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## DARE: the Drug-Induced Arrhythmia Risk Evaluation Study

Ventricular arrhythmias due to psychiatric and other drugs can cause life-threatening events that are usually due to prolongation of cardiac repolarisation, torsades de pointes (TdP) and ventricular fibrillation (VF). These events have generated public and medical concern due to their unpredictability, and the lack of understanding of their epidemiological and clinical significance. Drugs such as thioridazine and droperidol have been withdrawn from the market because of this side-effect.

The DARE Study is a collaboration between St George's Hospital (London) and the Drug Safety Research Unit (DSRU) (Southampton), funded by the British Heart Foundation. The lead researchers are Professors A. J. Camm and S. A. Shakir. The study was launched officially on 1 July 2003 and will run for 5 years.

The study's principal aims and components are: (1) an epidemiological study to systematically document and follow up incident cases in England, comparing them with controls – the relative risk of predisposing clinical factors will be

calculated, and both epidemiological cohorts will be described and the outcomes compared; (2) a genetic study to analyse blood samples from cases and controls for mutations and polymorphisms of the cardiac sodium and potassium ion channel genes implicated in the Long QT and Brugada syndromes. We hypothesise that there is a significant association of genotype with drug-induced arrhythmia.

We expect that the predictability and awareness of the condition will thus be increased and result in safer prescribing and drug development.

The study will rely on recruiting patients (cases) who have had a proarrhythmic event via psychiatrists and hospital physicians in England. Inclusion criteria will be at least one of the following, diagnosed and secondary to therapeutic drug administration or drug overdose:

- Documented TdP, VF or non-polymorphic ventricular tachycardia
- Exacerbation of an already existent ventricular arrhythmia
- Severe QT prolongation (corrected QT interval  $\geq 500$  ms).

An information pack will be provided to all psychiatrists interested in participating

in this study. The pack will include 'consent to contact cards' for both the patient and psychiatrist to briefly complete and return to the DSRU. This is all that will be required and we will address any local research ethics committee issues that may arise. If the patient permits contact to be made then a research nurse will arrange to visit him or her at home to discuss the study further and obtain consent. A questionnaire will be completed and an electrocardiogram and blood sample taken if the patient consents. The patient will also be asked to separately consent to access to their hospital and general practice medical notes. The study also has an interest in patients who may have died as an in-patient and also satisfy the inclusion criteria.

We would be delighted to provide further details to interested health professionals, and are keen to visit any interested units in order to make a brief presentation. Please contact us on (023) 8040 8615, dare@dsru.org, or via www.dsru.org for further details or if you feel that you may have a patient meeting the inclusion criteria.

## forthcoming events

The **Joint Meeting of the Transcultural Special Interest Group (TSIG) and the Royal College of Psychiatrists Faculty of Psychotherapy** will take place on 18 March 2004 at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, London. Application and programme available on TSIG web site and from Lisa Kass (tel: 020 7882 7727; e-mail: psychiatry@qmul.ac.uk).

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust has organised **The Portman Clinic 70th Anniversary Conference: Who's Afraid of Whom? Working with Deviancy and Dangerousness**. This conference will take place on 26–27 March 2004 at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Russell Square, London. The fee is £250. This conference is to celebrate the 70th birthday of the Portman Clinic. Papers will be presented by Portman staff as well as colleagues from other settings who work with similar patients. As well as the four main speakers, there will be a number of workshop presentations and small discussion groups to allow time for reflection and debate. The conference should be of interest to professional practitioners from all disciplines who are working with a

spectrum of patients and clients in the community and in Home Office or NHS institutions. The speakers are: Lord Alderdice, Don Campbell, Dr James Gilligan and Ann Horne. For further information please contact Vicky Harrison, the Conference and External Events Unit, The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, 120 Belsize Lane, London NW3 5BA (tel: 020 7447 3829; e-mail: events@tavi-port.org).

The Portman Clinic is also recruiting for its **Diploma in Forensic Psychotherapeutic Studies**. It is a multi-disciplinary course for professionals who work with offenders in hospitals, special hospitals, secure units, probation offices, the courts and the community. It aims to promote reflective thinking about psychodynamic concepts in relation to the forensic patient, and to facilitate collaborative work with other professionals. For further information, please contact The Portman Clinic, 8 Fitzjohn's Avenue, London NW3 5NA (tel: 020 7794 8262; e-mail: portman@tavi-port.org).

The **World Psychiatric Association (WPA) 2004 Regional & Inter Zonal Meeting** (Improving Mental Health in

Developing Countries) will be held in Lahore, Pakistan on 17–20 September 2004. For further details please contact Dr Afzal Javed, Chairperson International Advisory Committee, WPA Regional & Inter Zonal Meeting, The Medical Centre, Manor Court Avenue, Nuneaton CV11 5HX (tel: 024 76382609 or 76326111; fax: 024 76741716; e-mail: afzal.javed@ntlworld.com).

A one-day conference organised by the Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, entitled **'Beyond Death: does consciousness survive?'** will take place on 16 April 2004 in the Wolfson Lecture Theatre, King's College Hospital, Weston Educational Centre, Cutcombe Road, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RW. The aim of this day is to discuss broader issues surrounding phenomenological, philosophical and spiritual aspects of consciousness and its ability to survive after death. Current scientific research in this area will be presented, discussed in a spiritual wisdom context, and the implications of these ideas for mental health considered. For further details please visit <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/sig/spirit/#events>.