RUTGERS / AL-QUDS BRAIN RESEARCH EXCHANGE

A new brain research and education exchange between Rutgers University-Newark and Al-Quds University encompasses programs in basic neuroscience, clinical neurology, psychiatry, neuropsychology, and geriatrics. The exchange currently includes four components:

1. Palestinian doctors and students at Al-Quds University Medical School work in collaboration with faculty, staff, and students from the Center for Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience at Rutgers University-Newark on neuropsychological studies of Palestinian patients with brain disorders such as Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, clinical depression and stress/anxiety disorders.

2. Al-Quds doctors and students travel to Rutgers University in New Jersey, USA, for training, collaboration, and professional networking. Visits with affiliated neuroscience programs in the New York City/New Jersey region include Beth Israel Medical Center, Weill-Cornell Medical College, North Shore LIJ, UMDNJ/Robert Wood Johnson, and the University of Pennsylvania. These visits facilitate finding advanced post-graduate training in the United States for Al-Quds Medical School students.

3. Al-Quds doctors and students attend international conferences in Europe and the USA to present their research, learn about current research trends, and foster greater international visibility for Al-Quds University and Rutgers University.

4. Rutgers University faculty, staff, and students travel to Al Quds to assist in training Palestinian medical students, participate in joint training programs, and collaborate on brain research.

FUTURE PALESTINIAN NEUROSCIENCE INSTITUTE

The exchange with Rutgers University will assist in the establishment of a future Palestinian Neuroscience Institute at Al-Quds University, to be housed on the Abu Dis campus. The institute will provide advanced training and support for Palestinian medical students, doctors, and scientists in addition to establishing cooperative training and research programs with other regional medical and scientific institutions.

The Palestinian Neuroscience Institute will also administer a broader Palestinian Neuroscience Society, open to Palestinian scientists, doctors, and students around the world working in fields such as neurology, psychiatry, cognitive psychology, geriatrics, neuropsychology, and neuroscience. The society would apply for recognition from international organizations and seek representation at their international conferences.

CURRENT RESEARCH

Current research focuses on two projects:

1. Understanding the cognitive and psychiatric symptoms of Parkinson's disease and how they are affected by dopaminergic medications, and

2. Studies of decision making impairments associated with clinical depression and serotonergic medications. Depression is particularly prevalent in the region, especially among Palestinian women. Future research will incorporate genetic studies in both patients and healthy individuals, capitalizing on the relatively homogenous genetic profiles of the local Palestinian population. Patients are referred from neurological and psychiatric clinics in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron, and Bethlehem.

PUBLICATIONS


PUBLIC MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

The stigma of mental and neurologic illnesses represents a major problem for Palestinian patients and their families, often interfering with a family’s willingness to seek treatment for affected members. In order to raise awareness and understanding of brain disorders, we will conduct mental health education programs for public audiences, in addition to distributing Arabic-language brochures. Other programs will promote brain-healthy lifestyles and provide guidance on avoiding dementia and memory loss.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Dr. Mark A. Gluck, Ph.D., Professor of Neuroscience at Rutgers University-Newark and co-director of the Memory Disorders Project, has worked for the last five years with Al-Quds University and Hebrew University to organize two joint American-Israeli-Palestinian brain research conferences. The first, in 2005, pertained to Parkinson's disease; it was held in Jerusalem and co-sponsored by Al-Quds University. The second, in 2008, focused on Early Detection of Alzheimer’s Disease, and was hosted by both institutions. Following the 2008 conference, a new joint Rutgers-Al-Quds brain research project was established. The project is under the joint supervision of Dr. Mark Gluck and Dr. Adel Misk, M.D., a leading Palestinian neurologist affiliated with Al-Quds University.

Dr. Mark Gluck and the Al-Quds Cognitive Neuroscience Lab, Ramallah, 2010.