

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN ARTS THERAPIES ART, DANCE, DRAMA AND MUSIC THERAPY

Department of Psychological Medicine, Division of Neuroscience and Mental Health
Imperial College, London.

We are delighted to announce the formation of a research centre which will co-ordinate multidisciplinary research in the arts and arts therapies, psychotherapy and mental health. The Centre (ICRA) aims to act as a facilitator for improving the evidence base in arts therapies in particular. Its location within a Division of Neuroscience and Mental Health will be of particular value to new proposed research that will examine the effects of arts therapies for people with Alzheimer's Disease, Parkinson's Disease and other neurological disorders as well as for conditions that impact on mental health and well-being.

ICRA will be officially launched on Monday 21st September 2009 from 4 to 7 pm in the Alexander Fleming Building at the South Kensington Branch of Imperial College in Cromwell Road, SW7.

RATIONALE

There are many indications that a more inclusive approach to the care and treatment of people with mental health problems is needed – that is, one which brings together knowledge and skills from psychiatry, psychology, psychotherapy, the arts and humanities. The increased focus on inequity in access to services to promote or sustain good health, 'well-being' and 'lifestyle enhancement' especially in the case of older people requires a critical analysis of current approaches, and research which may lead to new improved services or the systematic development of current service provision. Some of the areas for urgent investigation include:

- How arts psychotherapies combined with usual care, may increase access to mental health services for older people from black and minority ethnic groups who are challenged by Eurocentric talking therapies that are English language focussed;
- How traditional arts and healing methods practised in resource-poor countries may be combined with standard care in order to develop more culturally sensitive services;
- Developing services that provide innovative ways in which people with progressive illnesses and their carers may be helped towards achieving a better quality of living through expressed emotion;
- The differential effects of the arts therapies for a range of people with moderate to severe mental health problems, including personality disorder, depression, psychosis and serious eating disorders. Of particular interest is the differential effects on outcomes – for example, there may be no clinical reduction in depression, but personal or work relationships may be sustained through remaining engaged with a particular form of arts therapy.

It was encouraging that the World Psychiatric Association Congress in Prague 2008 emphasized the need for psychiatry to utilise more fully the arts, social sciences and humanities towards the provision of more values-led and philosophically sophisticated services. This coincides with a considerable increase of interest among NHS Trusts and the general population in movements such as the Arts in Health, in the Arts Therapies (which are regulated professions), Creative Partnerships (in schools and community) and in the study of intercultural therapy aimed towards understanding the impact of traditional healing methods and the low uptake of mental health services among black and minority ethnic populations. Significant grants, mainly to sponsor the arts in health have been made available by charities such as Nuffield, the Arts Council, Leverhulme, Wellcome and others, towards the employment of workers who are making a contribution to both the physical and mental well-being of patients.

We feel, however, that as yet there is insufficient systematic evidence to demonstrate with conviction that the arts and arts therapies are effective for people with a range of mental health issues and moreover, if they are why is this, if not why not. Projects such as MATISSE, which is looking at the potential effectiveness of art therapy groups for people with schizophrenia, with its multi-professional team headed up by Drs Mike Crawford, Imperial, Helen Killaspy from UCL and Professor Diane Waller from Goldsmiths, and other well-designed qualitative or mixed methodology projects are essential in increasing our understanding of complex interventions like the arts therapies.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) does mention art and music therapy in its various guidelines, but rarely. This is because despite over 60 years of extensive case study research and other qualitative projects, there are as yet very few examples of thorough systematic reviews and hardly any control group studies. Yet the fact that art, music and dramatherapy are statutorily regulated and dance movement psychotherapy will be shortly, demonstrates that they have met rigorous criteria in terms of having a body of knowledge, postgraduate level training and an adequate research base such that registered practitioners can be safely employed in public services. There is much enthusiasm among these practitioners to carry out research but apart from the successful professional associations' practitioner research networks, and efforts by a few individuals within higher education and other public sector institutions, there is virtually no co-ordination or high level lead to ensure that sound projects are designed and carried out. Projects do not have to be random control studies or use quantitative methodology, but they need to be very rigorous.

Future plans for the Centre may involve the development of systematic evaluations into the use of the arts therapies with broader non-clinical populations or the use of the arts in communities and their role in social cohesion. It is intended as a facilitative network which will seek to obtain external funding for projects – something that has been hard to achieve in the arts therapies – particularly from the Research Councils - because of difficulties in locating the discipline in the existing frameworks.

Staff: The core team is currently :
Professor Diane Waller OBE, art psychotherapist and group analyst, Visiting Professor at Imperial (Chair)

Dr Mike Crawford, Reader in Psychological Medicine (Treasurer)
Anna Maratos, Head Music Therapist and member of Matisse management team
Administration: Sakina Hossany (part-time).

The team will be supported by an Advisory Committee. ICRA is proposed as a facilitating 'network' of interested groups and individuals, and we are glad to say that the UK arts therapies professional bodies are partners from the outset and have helped to sponsor the launch. Our aim is to link up with similar centres in the UK and abroad. We see ICRA as a developing process and greatly welcome advice and feedback from anyone who is interested in its aims.

ICRA is envisaged largely as a 'virtual centre' with occasional meetings in mutually agreed locations. Much dialogue can take place via tele and video-conferencing, and this will save greatly on travelling expenses especially since ICRA is planned as having an international focus.

The aim will be to attract research funding so that ICRA will be totally self-financing. It will offer a consultancy service at a modest fee for individuals or groups wishing to design research projects or have some input from ICRA staff and partners. Future plans may involve developing technology to utilise distance learning as is current practice with the Open University.

Administrator: Ms Sakina Hossany
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An Advisory Committee of individuals from UK and abroad who will provide expertise and support is currently being formed.

For further information please contact Sakina Hossany on the above email or Professor Diane Waller at diane.waller@virgin.net.

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