

Under the Microscope

With Professor Assen Jablensky

A collaborative study involving RPH and researchers from around the world has received \$785,000 from the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Western Australia and Inner City Mental Health Consultant Assen Jablensky is leading the study, which will look into genes and their links to schizophrenia.

“At any point in time, five out of every 1000 Australians have the symptoms of schizophrenia. It is a complex disorder we don’t know enough about and there are currently no effective prevention strategies,” Prof Jablensky said.

“What we are trying to do is locate the genes underlying the cognitive deficits in schizophrenia, which affect attention, memory and reasoning, in the hope we can in the future create medications capable of reaching the responsible molecular targets in the brain.”

People with schizophrenia often experience symptoms such as delusions and hallucinations and recent research demonstrates that cognitive impairments such as inaccurate information processing are at the core of the disorder and account for a high proportion of these symptoms.

For almost 10 years Prof Jablensky has lead the study involving 388 members of 112 families affected by schizophrenia.

“Families go through brain function tests and we compare the patient with schizophrenia with a healthy sibling of the same gender and of a similar age to examine the genetic similarities and differences”

A genetic linkage has been found in these families to a small segment on chromosome 6 and thanks to the recent grant, Prof Jablensky’s team will embark on a search for the specific gene (or genes) contributing to cognitive deficits in schizophrenia.

This study involves collaboration with researchers overseas (in the US and the Netherlands).

“Our aim is to improve the quality of life of those people suffering from schizophrenia, a disorder that accounts for close to three per cent of the global burden of disease and disability.”