Active Research Projects / Ongoing Child & Adolescent Recruitment Needs*

*Clinical research depends on active and consistent referral of potential participants. To make a referral or to learn more about each project, please use the contact information listed for each study. Staff associated with each study can provide a full project description, as well as provide you with HH IRB-approved advertisements to give to potential participants.

Brain Correlates of Buspirone in the Treatment of Anxiety in Autism Spectrum Disorders (PI Assaf). This study will examine brain activity in addition to anxiety and social communication symptoms severity to evaluate how the brains of people with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) respond to treatment with Buspirone. Recruitment Needs: This study recruits patients with ASD, ages 5 to 21, who are about to start treatment with Buspirone, as determined by their psychiatrist (our research protocol will not alter the treatment regimen). MRI scans will be done to patients 8 years old or older. Patients will be evaluated before treatment initiation and 8-12 weeks into the treatment. For more information, please contact Christina at the Olin Center, 545-7765.

Characterizing Two Distinct ADHD Neurobiologies with fMRI (PI Stevens). This NIMH-funded 5-year study will explore neural correlates of impulsivity in adolescents (13-17) with ADHD and link evidence for dysfunction in two separate neural pathways to genetic markers. Recruitment Needs: The study is actively recruiting both healthy control and ADHD-diagnosed teens. Over the next 4 years, 130 ADHD and 130 healthy controls are needed. Referral from private practice clinics and structured IOL treatment programs are both welcome. Contact Danielle, 545-5731, www.harthosp.org/adhd.

Adolescent Maturation of Brain Network Integration for Executive Control Abilities (PI Stevens). This is an NIH-funded cross-sectional study of brain development in typically-developing, non-psychiatric adolescents and young adults (ages 12-24). A total of 120 volunteers overall are needed to participate in fMRI, cognitive testing, and interviewing. Contact Emily, 545-7545.

Motivation and Emotion Neural Function in Adolescent Depression: An fMRI Study (PI Stevens). The study is collecting data examining abnormalities within brain systems engaged for motivation and emotional processing in teenagers diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder. Recruitment Needs: In the next year, we need to recruit and collect fMRI data from 25 adolescents ages 12-18 with MDD (limited other psychiatric co-morbidities). We are interested in collecting data that compare youth who are taking SSRI or other antidepressant medication and those who are unmedicated. Referral from private practice clinics and structured IOL treatment programs are both welcome. Contact Andrea, 545-7670.

Biomarker Schizophrenia Network on Intermediate Phenotypes (B-SNIP) (PI Pearlson). The purpose of the B-SNIP study is to discover how the risk for schizophrenia and bipolar disorder is transmitted in families, to identify the most important risk genes and to measure brain structure and function, personality and cognitive abilities affected by the disorders. This is a study of patients with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder and 1st degree relatives. Recruitment Needs: Although the study is open to adults up to age 65, the project will recruit teens age 16+. Contact Nelly, 545-7840 or nabkowicz@harthosp.org, (www.b-snip.org).

Language Functioning in Optimal Outcome Children with a History of Autism (PI Fein). This study uses fMRI, measures of brain structure, and neuropsychological assessment to examine brain function elicited by language and social information processing in children and adolescents with Autistic Spectrum Disorders who no longer meet diagnostic criteria for ASD as the result of intensive therapy. Recruitment Needs: In the next two years, 11-18 year old children diagnosed with autism are needed for the study. Contact Dr. Stevens, 545-7552.

New Child & Adolescent Research Grants

Adolescent Maturation of Brain Network Integration for Executive Control Abilities (PI Stevens). NIMH $2,256,061. This research project will examine the transition from adolescence to adulthood with a particular focus on the maturation of executive function and the changes in neural circuitry that co-occur. The project began May 1st, 2009.

Alcohol Use in College Students: Cognition and fMRI (PI Pearlson). NIMH. S $3,134,465. US college students are at high risk for problem drinking. This project will recruit and test cognitively 2000 first-year students from local colleges in Connecticut, fMRI scan a representative sub-sample and assess alcohol and drug use by web-based reporting over 2 years, when all students will be retested/rescanned. Findings from this study will provide important insights on risk factors for problem drinking and how alcohol use impacts the developing adolescent brain.
Grant Submissions

An fMRI study of the effect of working memory training on ADHD brain Dysfunction (PI Stevens). This is a NIMH R21 proposal to study the effects of intensive working memory training on symptom expression and cognitive ability in ADHD teenagers.

Social Skills Training Effects in Autism Spectrum Disorders on Mentalization fMRI: A randomized, controlled study (PI Assaf). This proposal to Autism Speaks foundation will study the effect of social skills training on brain function and behavior in youth with autistic spectrum disorders.

Functional Connectivity during Resting State fMRI as a Biological Outcome Measure for Social Skills Training in Autism Spectrum Disorders (PI Assaf). This proposal to the Department of Defense will examine neural network connectivity in youth with autistic spectrum disorders.

Residency Research Fellowship Opportunities

Each year, awards/fellowships are available for psychiatric residents to engage in research career development activities. Application deadlines typically are in early October. If interested, please contact Dr. Michael Stevens (545-7552) or Dr. Adrienne Bentman (545-7183).

Recent Publications / Presentations


General Child & Adolescent Research News/Reminders

Anyone interested in conducting a research project involving children or adolescents at the IOL is encouraged to contact Dr. Stevens for assistance in conceptualizing study designs, being connected with other researchers with similar interests to build collaborations, or assistance navigating Research Administration/IRB requirements. This offer includes assistance and encouragement for clinicians to author case-reports on interesting patient care issues that may impact the practice of psychiatry as a whole.

There also are opportunities to assist current projects that can be discussed on a case-by-case basis, including opportunities for student internships in clinical psychiatric research.

Please direct any inquiries/corrections about the contents of this newsletter to Dr. Michael C. Stevens, Director of Child & Adolescent Research at the Institute of Living: mstevens@harthosp.org / (860) 545-7552.

If you did not receive this quarterly newsletter directly, but would like to be added to the mailing list, please contact Laci-Ann Mosher at (860) 545-7800 or lmosher@harthosp.org.