by Zuali Malsawma

2015 Young Scientist Awards

EMERGING RESEARCHERS are making outstanding contributions to our understanding of ADHD. CHADD presents Young Scientist Research Fund Awards to deserving recipients during its annual conference every November. Highly qualified applicants submit papers on their research, renowned ADHD experts review the submissions, and select the winners.

Ann Abramowitz, PhD, chair of CHADD's professional advisory board, presented the 2015 awards to **Meghan Miller, PhD**, and **Walter Roberts, MS**. Zuali Malsawma, research librarian at CHADD's National Resource Center on ADHD, administers the program. The awards are supported through generous funding from Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc., of Titusville, New Jersey, and by a number of individual donations.

Infants at Risk for ADHD: A Longitudinal Study

Meghan Miller, PhD, is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, Davis MIND Institute. She received a PhD in clinical psychology from the University of California, Berkeley in 2013. Dr. Miller's research aims to determine how symptoms associated with ADHD and other neurodevelopmental disorders develop beginning very early in life.

ADHD has long been recognized as a disorder that begins early in development. In fact, although the average age of diagnosis isn't until around age 7, many parents of children with ADHD say that they first became concerned when their child was an infant or young toddler. It is important to determine the first signs of emerging ADHD in order to enhance early detection efforts and contribute to prevention and intervention programs that can be applied very early in life. Because ADHD has a tendency to run in families, a useful strategy for investigating how its symptoms emerge is to study infants who have a first degree relative (an older sibling or parent) diagnosed with ADHD. These infants are considered to be at higher risk for developing ADHD.

By studying these infants over time, Dr. Miller hopes to identify very early behaviors that signal the impending development of ADHD. Ultimately, the hope is that this research will advance efforts to detect ADHD earlier than has previously been possible, and that it will provide a basis for the development of intervention and prevention programs that can be applied early in life, potentially preventing the substantial lifelong impairment often associated with ADHD.

Risk for Alcohol Use Disorder in Adults with ADHD: The Role of Acute Alcohol Effects

Walter Roberts, MS, is a doctoral candidate in the clinical psychology program at the University of Kentucky and is currently completing his pre-doctoral internship in the University of Kentucky Internship Consortium Program. His research focuses on sensitivity to alcohol in adults with ADHD.

Adolescents and adults with ADHD can have a troubled relationship with alcohol. Many people with ADHD will develop alcohol use disorders at some point in their lives. Even those who will never meet criteria for alcohol use disorder often report other difficulties with alcohol, such acting impulsively or making bad decisions while intoxicated, which can occur even after having only a few drinks.

Roberts' research uses behavioral pharmacology to explore how adults with ADHD behave after drinking. Participants in his studies receive moderate doses of alcohol and perform tasks that measure their abilities to make choices quickly and accurately or control impulses. This research has shown that compared to adults without ADHD, those with ADHD become more impaired after drinking, both in terms of impulsiveness and motor control. A related study Roberts conducted showed that under similarly low doses of alcohol, adults with ADHD become primed to drink alcohol in greater quantities, a trait that may push these individuals towards alcohol addiction.

These studies inform our understanding of alcohol-related problems in people with ADHD. Roberts hopes that his research will guide the development of specialized interventions to help people with both ADHD and alcohol use disorder regain control over their drinking.