

Neuroscience, Mental Health and Addictions Take Centre Stage at Issues of Substance 2009

HALIFAX, November 17, 2009 – The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) today announced that *Issues of Substance (IOS) 2009*—Canada’s biennial national conference on substance abuse—will look at the role of neuroscience, mental health and addictions and how research, treatment, and educational systems must evolve to effectively treat concurrent disorders.

Concurrent disorders, defined as two disorders or illnesses occurring in the same person, is gradually becoming an area of significant interest in the field of addictions. It is estimated that up to 50 percent of those with substance abuse issues will also have a mental illness. Yet many of those receiving mental health treatment will not have access to substance abuse services and many of those receiving substance abuse treatment will not have access to mental health services. While the two conditions often share common biological, psychological and social antecedents that are not easily dissociated, those people with concurrent disorders are infrequently treated using an integrated and unified approach for the two disorders.

Dr. Franco J. Vaccarino, PhD, Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry, as well as Principal of the University of Toronto Scarborough and Vice-President of the University of Toronto, will speak to concurrent disorders today in a plenary session entitled “Neuroscience, Discovery Research and Treatment Implications.”

“We tend to view mental illness and substance use disorders as two distinctly separate illnesses and in many cases they are,” said Dr. Franco J. Vaccarino. “Yet when the two disorders co-occur and are intertwined through neurological mechanisms, treating just one disorder or treating the two disorders independently is insufficient—and yet this is often what is done. Even our current accreditation guidelines for clinical care can allow institutions to choose between addictions or mental health standards, perpetuating the separation of addiction and mental health knowledge.”

The interplay between mental health and substance use is significant:

- Problems with impulse-control have been found to be the single strongest predictor of future substance abuse
- People with anxiety disorders are at two to five times greater risk of having a problem with drugs or alcohol
- Risk of substance use is at least double for those with Major Depressive Disorder
- Over 50 percent of adolescent patients seen in psychiatric clinics use substances
- People with schizophrenia are almost five times more likely to have substance use problems than people without mental disorders

- The risk of schizophrenia in high users of Cannabis is six times higher than in non-users

In addition to his work as a neuroscientist, Dr. Franco J. Vaccarino is also a member of CCSA's Scientific Advisory Council (SAC), which was assembled in 2008 to provide a biomedical, neuroscience lens to CCSA's work in the field of substance abuse. In January 2010 the Council will be releasing a *Substance Abuse in Canada* report on concurrent disorders that will look at the role of stress and trauma, anxiety disorders, impulsivity, mood disorders and psychosis in relation to substance use.

In addition to the plenary presentation, today's IOS 2009 agenda includes an additional four sessions on mental health and addictions, as well as 11 sessions on topics ranging from the role of stigma and identity in the healing journeys of criminalized First Nations women to an interactive session on youth engagement in substance use prevention and health promotion.

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About CCSA:

With a legislated mandate to reduce alcohol- and other drug-related harms, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse provides leadership on national priorities, fosters knowledge-translation within the field, and creates sustainable partnerships that maximize collective efforts. CCSA receives funding support from Health Canada.

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