

Six UCSD Scientists Receive NARSAD's Prestigious 2008 Young Investigator Award

July 1, 2008

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Six scientists from the University of California, San Diego have been selected by NARSAD, the world's leading charity dedicated to mental health research, to each receive a 2008 Young Investigator Award.

The UC San Diego scientists are six of 220 early-career scientists in the United States and 11 other countries who will receive funds this year from NARSAD (formerly known as the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression) to advance their research on psychiatric disorders.

Each of the scientists will receive \$60,000 from NARSAD over the next two years to study a variety of topics:

Adam R. Aron, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Psychology, plans to evaluate hypomania, or a mood state characterized by racing thoughts and "disinhibited" behavior, by examining the neuropsychiatric effects of deep brain stimulation in patients with Parkinson's disease.

Tiffany A. Greenwood, Ph.D., assistant adjunct professor in the Department of Psychiatry, will utilize DNA microarray technology, which facilitates the simultaneous study of multiple gene interactions, to construct a custom "gene chip" to identify candidate genes related to mental illness. This research builds on a previous NARSAD-funded study led by UCSD colleague David Braff, M.D., professor of psychiatry and director of the Schizophrenia Program at UCSD School of Medicine, who was awarded a NARSAD Distinguished Investigator award in 2007.

Arpi Minassian, Ph.D., assistant clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry, will study the catechol-O-methyltransferase (COMT) gene in 84 patients with manic bipolar disorder. The study will assess the impact of varying levels of dopamine in the frontal cortex, with the potential to predict inhibition and other types of behavior in bipolar patients.

Terunaga Nakagawa, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, will study gross anatomical defects in the brains of individuals with mental disorders. By evaluating the development of glutamate receptors at the molecular level, this research may help pave the way for future therapeutic and diagnostic methods.

Martin Weber, Ph.D., postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Psychiatry, will use animal models to study potentially novel drugs for schizophrenia and biochemical pathways central to the disease.

Jared W. Young, Ph.D., postdoctoral employee in the Department of Psychiatry, is using mice to determine a viable way to utilize nicotine as a therapeutic treatment option for cognitive therapy in patients with schizophrenia. Nicotinic acetylcholine receptors (nAChR) may exert pro-cognitive effects of nicotine without any deleterious side-effects, thus paving the way to development of a drug that will improve the lives of schizophrenia patients.

NARSAD created the Young Investigator Award to help the most promising scientists who are now entering research - post-doctoral fellows, advanced-standing medical residents, and assistant professors - to generate pilot data necessary for larger grants. The awardees were selected by NARSAD's Scientific Council, comprised of 103 prominent leaders in mental health research, which reviews the project proposals to select innovative, promising studies for funding support.

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