NEWSLETTER 2021

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Kim Do Cuénod was elected president of the **Swiss Society of Biological Psychiatry** (SSBP, www.ssbp.ch) at the general assembly in November 2020. SSBP is a member of the World Federation of Societies of Biological Psychiatry (WFSBP) and associated with the Swiss Society of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy. Its objective is to foster research, education and collaboration regarding the biological basis of psychiatry and neuroscience as well as corresponding research methodologies and treatment modalities.

SSBP SWISS SOCIETY OF BIOLOGICAL PSYCHIATRY
SGBP Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Biologische Psychiatrie
SSPB Société Suisse de Psychiatrie Biologique
SSPB Societá Svizzera di Psichiatria Biologica
www.ssbp.ch
S S B P
Member of the WORLD FEDERATION OF SOCIETIES OF BIOLOGICAL PSYCHIATRY

The **40th Annual Meeting** of the Swiss Society of Biological Psychiatry, which had to be cancelled in 2020 because of the sanitary restrictions, took place on September 17th, 2021, at Campus Biotech in Geneva. For a great number of participants, it was the first in person meeting since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic – a cheerful event for everyone!

The program of the Meeting was interesting and varied ; keynote speakers of several Swiss universities were present as well as Prof. Rudolf Uher of Dalhousie University in Canada (via teleconference).
Young researchers were also in the spotlight ; they had the opportunity to present their work in the form of posters. The organizers received a total of 38 posters, which represents a nice success! Among these posters, 3 received a prize – the authors were awarded respectively an amount of CHF 750 (1st prize), CHF 500 (2nd prize) and CHF 250 (3rd prize).

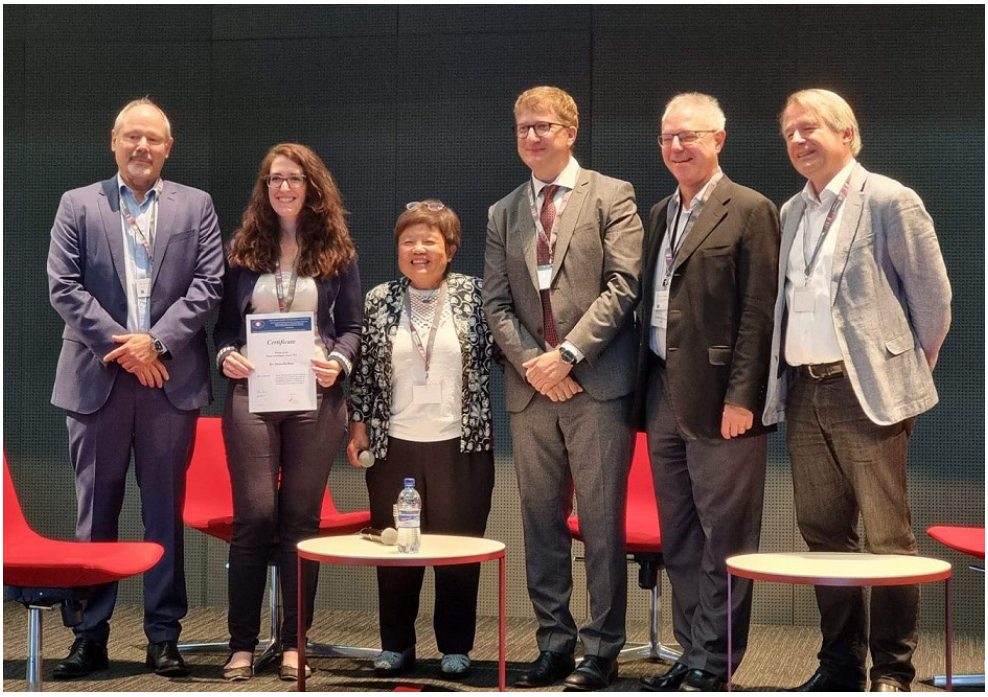
Dr Tobias Bracht, 1st prize

Dr Pascal Steullet receives the prize on behalf of Dr Corinne El Khoueiry, 2nd prize

Mr Fabien Carruzzo, 3rd prize

One of the highlights of the Meeting was the **«Young Investigator Award»** ceremony (award for a young researcher below the age of 40 years). In order to support and promote the research of young scientists in the field of biological psychiatry in Switzerland, SSBP awards CHF 5'000 every year to the best original scientific contribution to the advancement of the treatment and understanding of biological backgrounds of mental disorders. This contribution can be related to experimental, translational or clinical investigations from all disciplines of research in biological psychiatry (for example: epidemiology, genetics, patho- and neurophysiology, neurobiochemistry, etc.).

By decision of the SSBP Executive Committee, the «Young Investigator Award» 2021 was given to **Dr Daniella Dwir**, member of the research group directed by Kim Do Cuénod – a great reward for this young and brilliant scientist!



From left to right :
Prof. Jean-Michel Aubry (member & past president of the SSBP Executive Committee), Dr Daniella Dwir, Prof. Kim Do Cuénod (member & president of the SSBP Executive Committee) Prof. Sebastian Walther (member & treasurer of the SSBP Executive Committee), Prof. Martin Hatzinger (member of the SSBP Executive Committee), PD Dr Thorsten Mikoteit (member & secretary of the SSBP Executive Committee)

NEWS FROM RESEARCH

TARGETING MITOCHONDRIA IMPAIRMENT WITH MITOQ TO IMPROVE NEUROCOGNITION IN EARLY PSYCHOSIS A DOUBLE BLIND, RANDOMIZED, CROSS-OVER, PLACEBO CONTROLLED TRIAL

This is the complete title of the clinical trial undertaken by the Unit for Research in Schizophrenia (URS), which represents the outcome of significant experimental studies – essential for any clinical application – as well as a potential major breakthrough in the treatment of schiozophrenia, and more generally of psychosis.

- *Double blind* means that both patients and investigators ignore whether the drug capsule contains MitoQ or a placebo; this guarantees the objectivity of the clinical assessment in the course of the disease.
- *Randomized* means that the patients are selected randomly; however, a preliminary blood test will guarantee that there is about the same number of "high risk" patients and "low risk" patients, in order to be able to evaluate the efficiency of MitoQ in the best possible way.
- *Cross-over* means that, initially, patient group I will get MitoQ during 3 months while group II will get the placebo. After an interval of 14 days, the situation will be reversed: group I will receive the placebo and group II the MitoQ during 3 months. The advantage of this procedure is that it increases the number of patients who are treated with MitoQ, which allows more solid conclusions. It also facilitates their recruitment, as each patient has the opportunity to get the tested treatment.
- *Placebo controlled* means that the effect of the medication will be compared against the effect of the placebo, in order to make the two situations as identical as possible, except for the molecule under investigation.
- **Aim**: to investigate the role of oral administration of MitoQ on cognitive functions (working memory and attention / vigilance) in high risk psychosis patients as compared to low risk psychosis patients in the early phase of illness.

If successful, the treatment of patients suffering from schizophrenia with MitoQ will improve their symptoms and cognitive functions that are not well cured by present antipsychotics. Better cognition is essential to improved social and professional functioning, as well as quality of life in general.

On the whole, 80 young patients undergoing their first psychotic episode will participate in the trial, which is planned over a duration of 4 to 5 years. They will receive MitoQ in addition to the standard antipsychotic therapy, which has to be maintained for ethical reasons.

The URS team has produced a huge amount of work on the administrative and scientific levels in order to be able to start the trial as soon as possible. The various requested procedures are complex, highly time consuming, and have been slowed down because of the restrictions due to the pandemic. They involved, among other things, obtaining the approval of Swissethics, the umbrella organisation of the cantonal ethics committees regarding human research, as well as the authorisation of Swissmedic, the Swiss authority responsible for the authorisation and supervision of therapeutic products.

The trial was launched in May 2021 with a « kick-off meeting » bringing together all the stakeholders for a detailed presentation of the ins and outs of the study.

Photo: part of the team in charge of the trial, from left to right: Dr Sara Camporesi (clinician scientist), Dr Guillaume Marillier (clinician scientist), Dr Ines Khadimallah (research fellow), Ms Livia Alerci (psychologist & coordinator of the trial).

The evaluation and recruitment of patients who are likely to participate in the trial are under way; they have to be informed about the course of the study, and need to give their written consent. This process (which can be quite long and complex with psychotic persons) has already been completed with 9 patients.

The personnel needed to conduct the study has been recruited and trained (around thirty people on the whole); it is made up of collaborators belonging to several services of the Department of Psychiatry, as well as of newly hired people.

Theirs tasks fall within the framework of the different modules of the study:

- Recruitment of patients
- Clinical and neuropsychological evaluation
- Analysis of biomarkers
- EEG recordings and analyses
- MRS (magnetic resonance spectroscopy) recordings and analyses
- MRI, DTI, fMRI (magnetic resonance imaging, diffusion tensor imaging) recordings and analyses

MitoQ is provided free of charge by a company based in New Zealand (Antipodean Pharmaceuticals). The first patients will be able to start taking MitoQ in December 2021.

As a reminder, MitoQ is an antioxidant specifically targeted at mitochondria, which provide the energy needed for the proper functioning of neurons – in particular of parvalbumin interneurons (PVI), which play a key role in the performance of cognitive, affective and social activities. If successful, the treatment of patients suffering from schizophrenia with MitoQ will **improve their symptoms and cognitive functions that are not well cured by present antipsychotics**. Better cognition is essential for improved social and professional functioning, and quality of life. The asset of this treatment is to be based on pathophysiological mechanisms, and to be biomarker guided regarding both patient selection and efficacy assessment. It is therefore an **individualized treatment** of psychosis, a major innovation in the field of psychiatry.

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