

Slowing the onset of Alzheimer's symptoms A therapy developed at the Douglas provides hope

Montreal, January 7, 2010 - Researchers at the Douglas Mental Health University Institute are launching a research project to assess the effectiveness of cognitive remediation in slowing the onset of Alzheimer's disease for people with mild cognitive impairment. Developed by teams at the Douglas, the cognitive remediation program launched in January 2009 has produced what seem to be promising results. A research project involving neuropsychological, memory and attention tests will therefore begin in February 2010 to quantify participants' cognitive progress.

"This therapy seems to improve not only patients' cognitive deficits but also their quality of life and morale. A number of participants told us that the therapy has given them hope for maintaining independence, which is an invaluable benefit," said Céline Brunelle, a nurse clinician at the Douglas Institute Memory Clinic and co-investigator of the project.

The Douglas Institute cognitive remediation program (meaning to correct or alleviate a cognitive loss) includes three components: relaxation, mnemotechnic strategies, and computer stimulation. The goal is to improve the skills required to perform daily activities.

"This research project will allow us to measure the effectiveness of cognitive remediation; if the results are positive, we can add this therapy to our range of tools to treat people with predementia syndrome," explained David Fontaine, neuropsychologist and project co-investigator.

Also co-investigator on this project, Natasha Rajah, PhD, designed the study parameters with a psychosocial control group to help distinguish benefits linked to psychosocial aspects (e.g. being in a group, socializing) from benefits linked strictly to cognitive therapy. Natasha Rajah is a cognitive neuroscientist with a specialization in aging and dementia.

The research project will last two years. Participants are available to talk about their experience so far.

Principle investigators: Natasha Rajah, PhD, David Fontaine and Céline Brunelle.

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About the Douglas – www.douglas.qc.ca

The Douglas is a world-class institute affiliated with McGill University and the World Health Organization. Its mission is to treat people suffering from mental illness and offer them both hope and healing. The Institute's teams of specialists and researchers continually advance scientific knowledge, integrate it into patient care, and share it with the community to increase awareness and thus eliminate stigma around mental illness.