UCL INSTITUTE OF CHILD HEALTH

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Pre-school Autism Communication Trial Newsletter

Trial Update

The PACT Team

The PACT trial has now finished recruitment and with a sample size of 152 represents the largest treatment cohort in pre-school autism for a psycho-social treatment to our knowledge internationally. Our main results from the trial will be available from early autumn 2009 and other results will emerge over the following year or two.

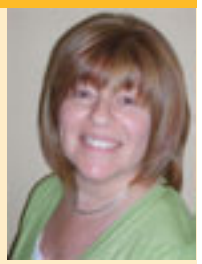
We are looking towards follow-up studies if funded by which we will be able to examine the development of this cohort through middle childhood and we plan to undertake further treatment and intervention studies as development progresses.

New Data Manager/ Study Co-ordinator

Following the departure of Dharmi Kapadia from the study, we are pleased to welcome Katy Bourne the new data manager/trial co-ordinator to the team. Katy will be responsible for the day to day running of the study office. She is also responsible for the data entry and data management.

"Hi my name is Katy and I am the new Study Co-ordinator. I am the most likely person you will reach if you contact the PACT office in Manchester. Originally from Crewe, South Cheshire, I moved to Manchester in 2003 to study Psychology at the University of Manchester and have stayed here ever since as I love the liveliness of the city! My hobbies include floristry, baking and cycling and I really enjoy going to new places and meeting new people."

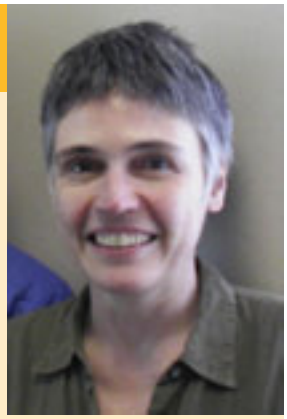
Trial Manager



Lydia White is responsible for the day to day management of the study, with a leading role in planning, co-ordinating and completing the study. This includes meeting regularly with all members of the study team, funders and members of the Trial Steering Committee and being responsible for ethics, study materials and finance of the study. With a degree in Economics, Lydia has been involved with trial management for over 10 years. Lydia is enjoying working on the PACT study and the challenges that it throws at her.

THIS ISSUE...

Are these behaviours the same or different?



Comparing repetitive behaviours in typically developing children and children with autism spectrum disorder, at a two year language age.

At the International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) recently held in London, it was too soon for our PACT study results to be presented. However, we summarise below for interest a paper presented by Professor Helen McConachie who is the study principal investigator in the North East.

Repetitive behaviours are one of the defining features of autism. Research suggests two groupings: 'low-level' (eg. repetitive motor movements) and 'high-level' (eg. insistence on sameness), and that the range and severity of repetitive behaviours are related to age and cognitive ability. But anyone who has experienced the "terrible twos" knows that repetitive behaviours are also common in typically developing young children. We asked: are these behaviours the same or different? That is, we compared the frequency and factor structure of repetitive behaviours in typically developing children and children with autism/ASD, at a comparable language level.

Eleven items from a Repetitive Behaviours Questionnaire had been answered by parents in two studies. Study 1 included 53 children (31 Autism, 22 ASD) aged between 35 and 67 months. Study 2 included 192 typically developing children aged 24 to 28 months. Both groups had completed a test of language ability.

We found a very similar two-factor structure underlying the results for the typically developing and Autism/ASD groups: a Repetitive Motor Behaviours Factor and a Rigidity/Sameness Factor. Furthermore, the two groups had much the same frequency and severity of reported repetitive behaviours. Typically developing children with more advanced language tended more towards Rigidity/Sameness behaviours. In this sample, age and better language were not related to type of behaviours in the Autism/ASD group (but when we followed them up at age 7 to 9 years we did find the expected pattern, i.e. fewer Repetitive Motor behaviours as they got older).

In summary, repetitive behaviours seem to be much the same in children with autism as they are in typically developing children at two years of age. The difficulty for families lies in the degree to which these behaviours continue long after the "terrible twos". The findings reinforce the suggestion that repetitive behaviours may not act as reliable early diagnostic markers. However, there may be qualitative differences in autism not picked up by a simple questionnaire, and further research is needed, especially before the age of two years.

Professor Helen McConachie
Principal Investigator

Contact PACT

If at any stage you wish to contact the PACT team please email us at pact@manchester.ac.uk

Further details of the study are available on the PACT website: http://www.medicine.manchester.ac.uk/pact/

You can also contact your local PACT office at:

Behavioural and Brain Sciences Unit
Institute of Child Health
30 Guilford Street
London WC1N 1EH
Telephone: 0207 905 2164

If you have any comments on this newsletter or would like to contribute an article please contact the PACT team

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DH Department of Health
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