

THE GILLBERG NEUROPSYCHIATRY CENTRE (GNC): A BRIEF REPORT OF DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE FIRST EIGHT MONTHS (OCT 2010 – MAY 2011)

Background

The GNC was created on September 29, 2010, after a Board decision in the Sahlgrenska Academy, following an agreement of substantial funding from the Birgit and Sten A Olsson Fund for Research into Psychiatric Disability, and additional funding from the Sahlgrenska Academy and the Sahlgrenska University Hospital. In addition, a new senior post in neuropsychiatry, the Birgit Olsson clinical lectureship/professorship of neuropsychiatry was decided to be placed within the GNC. The goal was set at increasing the numbers of child and adolescent psychiatry PhDs, post-docs, and dissertations by one hundred percent over a five-year-period. The build-up and establishment of an international network of neuropsychiatry was seen as vital, and the GNC would be expected to contribute to the dissemination of new knowledge through contributions to international conferences, research seminars, and a yearly “Birgit Olsson seminar”.

Steering group

A steering group consisting of Christopher Gillberg, the holder of the Birgit Olsson senior post of neuropsychiatry, a child neurologist (Ingrid Olsson), and the Sahlgrenska University Hospital chief of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Neurology and Habilitation was agreed upon in late 2010. It has convened three times since its inception. The steering group is a discussion and implementation forum. The formal administrative and HR responsibilities of the GNC unit are held by the prefect of the Institute of Neuroscience and Physiology at the Sahlgrenska Academy.

Inauguration

The GNC localities at Kungsgatan 12, Gothenburg, were inaugurated in the presence of actress Suzanne Reuter on May 6, 2011.

The GNC activities were inaugurated by HRH Queen Silvia of Sweden on May 26, 2011 in the presence of an international audience. Emeritus Prince of Wales Professor of Childhood Epilepsy Brian Neville gave the first GNC Queen Silvia lecture on Febrile Seizures, with special wishes for successful future development from HRH Prince Charles England.

Both events were well attended and successfully planned and executed.

Summary of developments in the specifically targeted areas of the GNC

In September 2010, there were 6 registered PhDs within the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (CAP). - Since October 2010, 11 new PhDs have been registered or are in the process of being registered at the GNC. Of these, one is working in Kochi, Japan (where a “subsidiary” of the Gothenburg GNC is currently being set up by the Kochi prefecture). A 12th PhD is working in the Child Neuropsychiatry Centre at Glasgow University (currently being considered for development into another subsidiary of the Gothenburg GNC) with supervision from one of the post-docs at the Gothenburg GNC.

In September 2010, there were no post-docs formally linked to the CAP. - By May 2011, 3 post-docs were formally employed at or linked to the GNC. Two further post-docs were planned for arrival within the next 10 months.

During 2009-2010 there was one dissertation within the CAP. - For 2011-2012, 5 dissertations have been scheduled (3) or are in the process of being scheduled (2).

In September 2010, there was one senior post (Christopher Gillberg’s chair in child and adolescent psychiatry) in the CAP. It is envisaged that by the end of 2011 there will be three such posts specifically within the GNC (Gillberg’s post, the new Birgit Olsson chair, and another new chair in neurodevelopment/neuropsychiatry, see below).

The first international publications emanating from the GNC have appeared in print.

Other important developments at the GNC

Admin staff

On October 1 2010, Christopher Gillberg was the only person spending time on the development of the unit. One month later, Elisabet Wentz, MD, PhD, started work as a consultant. Agneta Holmäng and Henrik Zetterberg (prefect and vice-prefect at the Institute of Neuroscience and Physiology within which the GNC is formally located) have been very active in facilitating all aspect of the development of the centre. New localities were found in November of 2010 in the building that houses both the Child Neuropsychiatry Clinic and the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in central Gothenburg. These were refurbished and furnished “from scratch” and it was possible to slowly establish activities there from February 1, 2011. A research coordinator was hired from the beginning of 2011, followed by a secretary (part-time) and a PhD-research manager (part-time) from March and May 2011. These three posts are currently being advertised.

New Birgit Olsson chair

The new Birgit Olsson chair of child neuropsychiatry was advertised in late 2010, and the holder is currently being appointed.

New chair of neuropsychiatry/neurodevelopment

The holder of a part-time clinical lectureship in child and adolescent psychiatry is currently being considered for a new chair (part-time funded by the GNC) in neurodevelopment/neuropsychiatry.

Research staff

PhDs and postdocs are in place as described in the previous section, and are either being employed and funded by the GNC or employed in other centres, hospitals, or universities and funded by the GNC (or by external grants held by Christopher Gillberg).

New clinical lectureships are in the process of being developed.

A research nurse is currently being appointed for a post at the Child Neuropsychiatry Clinic (separately funded) with full-time work in the GNC.

International conference

The GNC co-organised the major international **Social Brain 3/No Mind Left Behind** conference in Glasgow in March 2011. This conference, attended by almost 1000 delegates was a huge success and is now available in virtual format.

Research seminars

Three international research seminars, one on febrile seizures, one on autism in Japan, and one on developmental and neuropsychiatric problems in Glasgow, have been held at the GNC in November 2010, March 2011, and May 2011.

International collaboration

The Japanese Kochi Gillberg Neuropsychiatry Centre is being launched in the autumn of 2011, formal agreements between the Sahlgrenska Academy and the Kochi Prefectural Government are at an advanced stage.

The GNC at Glasgow is currently under discussion with leaders at Glasgow University and NHS services in Glasgow.

Further formal international collaboration (Bergen, London, the Faroe Islands) is in the planning process. A part-time research manager located in the Glasgow team will be hired from August 2011 with the responsibility of building up the international network for neuropsychiatric research in Japan, Scotland, England, and the Faroe Islands.

Website

The homepage of the GNC (gnc.gu.se) was launched in March 2011 and is currently quickly being developed by the research coordinator.

Laboratory development

The neuropsychiatry/neuropsychology laboratory at the GNC is currently being developed, including state-of-the-art equipment that is already being used in several of the ongoing studies (autism, Asperger syndrome, speech-and-language delay).

Virtual brain

In collaboration with national and international groups, the GNC is planning to pursue the idea of developing a virtual brain, along the lines of "google map".

Other plans

The GNC is involved in building up bridges with Beautiful Minds, an organisation that wants to find appropriate work for individuals with neuropsychiatric disorders. The GNC wants to establish a Research and Development plan conjointly with Beautiful Minds.

The first Birgit Olsson lecture will be held in the autumn of 2011.

Discussions with possible external funders are underway.

Research ongoing within the GNC

Very high-profile research activities are already underway at the GNC including:

- i) autism prevalence studies (Gothenburg, Stockholm, Faroe Islands, Glasgow)
- ii) autism intervention studies (Gothenburg, Stockholm)
- iii) autism genetic studies (Sweden, Faroe Islands, France)
- iv) autism environmental factors studies (Gothenburg, Stockholm, Faroe Islands)
- v) Asperger syndrome neuroimaging studies (Gothenburg, NIH, Lausanne)
- vi) Asperger syndrome and autism outcome studies (Gothenburg, Faroe Islands, Stockholm)
- vii) ADHD-intervention studies (psychosocial, education, medication, alternative treatments)
- viii) Anorexia nervosa follow-up study
- ix) Anorexia nervosa intervention study

These listed studies will be followed by several new studies (e.g. of 22q11-deletion syndrome, febrile seizures, speech and language disorders and qualitative studies/attitude studies) during the next ten months.

Funding

The GNC will be relying on the level of funding that was agreed in the preparatory work for the funding decisions taken by the Birgit and Sten A Olsson Fund for Research into Psychiatric Disability in the spring of 2010 (both for the Birgit Olsson chair, and for PhDs, postdocs, admin staff and space), and by the Sahlgrenska Academy in September 2010 (including agreements regarding overhead costs and certain admin and HR support, plus the funding of the research nurse that will be provided by the NHS through "ALF-money").

The GNC, in spite of being inaugurated only a few weeks ago, has already managed to secure money from external funders, including the FAS.

The GNC is currently exploring ways in which to establish and fund qualitative as well as more "classic" quantitative neuropsychiatric development and research and plan to have discussions with the Arvsfonden, Vårdalsinstitutet, and FAS, in the next several months in this context.

Gothenburg, June 2011,

Christopher Gillberg
Chair of the GNC Steering Committee