Gambling

Gambling may be defined as any game of chance involving financial stakes and an element of risk. Such games are common in our society, either using one's own money (e.g. the National Lottery, betting on horse or dog racing, visiting a casino or on-line gambling) or, better, other people's money (e.g. banking, insurance, the Stock Market). Gambling as a form of risk-taking and decision-making, is of interest to neuropsychologists and may be characterised as an executive function task, amenable to testing with instruments such as the Iowa Gambling Task (IGT) and the Cambridge Gambling Task. The neural anatomical substrates of such decision making are believed to encompass the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala. Gambling may be defined as pathological when greater risks are taken and potential losses are correspondingly greater. DSM categories pathological gambling as an impulse control disorder. A famous 'sufferer' from this addiction was the author Fyodor Dostoevsky, who wrote a novella, ‘Addiction’ (1866), on the subject (in just 26 days). Pathological gambling may also be a reflection of brain disease and its treatment.

A number of reports of pathological gambling in patients with Parkinson's disease have appeared, the common factor apparently being treatment with various dopamine agonists. Whether the small numbers of patients reported in these case series simply reflect the population prevalence of gambling behaviour, irrespective of treatment, or whether the numbers of PD patients with 'problematic gambling' are in fact much higher (e.g. 10% of patients prescribed dopamine agonists in the west of Scotland) remains to be clarified. Certainly cases may be seen outwith dedicated PD treatment centres: I have been told of at least one case (of a patient of mine) at a local hospital clinic, and of a case of an old man who used to bet on the horses with his wife with whom he shares half his winnings, no tailing off in his success rate; the bookies have noticed he says little but believe he has had a stroke.

References

Awards and Appointments

Professor Gavin Giovannoni and Professor David Baker have moved from the Institute of Neurology, Queen Square, to take up joint appointments at the Institute of Cell and Molecular Science, Queen Mary University London. Gavin Giovannoni has taken up the Chair of Neurology, with a joint appointment at Barts and The London NHS Trust. Gavin has held a personal chair in neuroimmunology, He received his BSc in Zoology from Bedford College, University of London in 1983. He trained in immunology at The Hunterian Institute, University of London and received his PhD in 1987 for studies on control of immune responses in delayed hypersensitivities of the skin.

David Baker developed a novel relapsing-remitting model of MS in the late 1980s, which closely mimics the clinical disease course of MS. Using this model he has discovered a particularly effective immune tolerance strategy to treat antigen-specific autoimmunity, which he hopes will translate into clinical practice. Their research programme includes MS-related neurodegeneration, MS biomarker discovery, neutralising anti-interferon beta antibodies as model of human autoimmunity, immune tolerance strategies and antibody mediated autoimmune disorders of the central nervous system. They currently hold a programme grant from the US National MS Society and the MS Society of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to investigate novel neuroprotective and neurorestorative therapies in patients with MS.

We would like to publish more awards and appointments in future issues of ACNR. If you know of someone who should be considered for this feature, please send details to Rachael@acnr.co.uk