



Changes for the RQSHA

April 28, 2020

Dear members of the RQSHA,

As you know, the *Réseau québécois sur le suicide, les troubles de l'humeur et les troubles associés* (RQSHA) is ushering a new era as Drs. Gustavo Turecki and Alain Lesage step down from their leadership roles. We extend to them a heartfelt thank you for their vision in creating the RQSHA and the dedication and wisdom with which they have led it in the past ten years. Though they are stepping aside from their executive roles, they continue to be active members who will contribute to the vibrancy of this successful *réseau thématique*.

At the same time, the RQSHA welcomes Drs. Patricia Conrod and Naguib Mechawar as the new Director and Co-director, respectively, effective April 1, 2020. We are lucky to have individuals of such high calibre take over the leadership of the RQSHA. Dr. Conrod's energy and vision will no doubt drive the RQSHA forward through even greater collaboration between Québec researchers of various disciplines. Dr. Mechawar offers complementary expertise, with neurobiologic approaches to suicide research. His longstanding involvement in the RQSHA will ensure continuity and success in the coming years.

– Dr. Sylvanne Daniels, Coordinator



Dr. Patricia Conrod is a Clinical Psychologist and Professor of Psychiatry at Université de Montréal, as well as an associate member of the departments of Pediatrics and Neuroscience. She holds a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Preventative Mental Health and Addiction and the Fondation Julien/Jean et Marcelle Coutu philanthropic research chair in Social and Community Pediatrics and leads a multi-disciplinary research team at CHU Ste Justine. Dr. Conrod's research focuses on causes and consequences of substance use and mental disorders from a developmental perspective. She developed a targeted drug and alcohol prevention program which was evaluated in multiple international trials and is now recognised as an evidence-based program in the *U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Addiction*, and the UNODC's *International Guidelines on Drug Prevention*. She published over 200 peer-reviewed articles and is cited over 16,000 times in the scientific literature. Her publications are also widely covered in the media, including the *New York Times*, *Wall St Journal*, *Financial Times*, *CNN*, *CBC*, and *BBC*. She is an associate editor of the *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, and director of a number of research consortia, including the ENIGMA-Addiction consortium, the CIHR Canadian Cannabis and Psychosis Research Team (CCPRT), the Canadian Underage Substance Use Prevention (CUSP) team, the SSHRC UniVenture Partnership, and the CRISM-Health Canada Emerging Health Threat-At Risk User Research Team.



It is with great pleasure that I accept the directorship of the RQSHA, in collaboration with Dr. Naguib Mechawar as co-director. My research focusing on the factors that drive common vulnerability towards substance use and mental health conditions is highly relevant to the aims of the RQSHA. This research has led me to appreciate the importance of preventative measures that promote good mental health and delay onset of substance use. I have come to discover that the most effective interventions are those which promote the development of effective cognitive and behavioural strategies necessary for life-long autonomy, self-regulation and health, whether such strategies are promoted at the individual, organizational or population level. Furthermore, experiences serving on and chairing grant review committees and health research advisory boards have given me a broad perspective on the competing forces involved in health promotion and evaluation. I am ceaselessly committed to sharing research findings with policy makers and the general public. Accordingly, I have participated in a number of research consortia and advisory committees aimed at developing evidence-based policy for regulating addictive substances and behaviours, and their concurrent conditions. I very much look forward to collaborating with the members of the RQSHA and helping to lead the network towards new horizons.

– Dr. Patricia Conrod, Director



Dr. Naguib Mechawar is a Professor of Psychiatry at McGill University and a researcher at the Douglas Research Centre, where he leads the Stress, Anxiety, Depression and Suicide theme-based group.

He joined the McGill Group for Suicide Studies in 2007 and has been an active member of the RQSHA since its creation in 2009. He is also the director of the Douglas-Bell Canada Brain Bank, one of the largest human brain banks in the world. Dr. Mechawar heads the Molecular neuroanatomy of mood disorders and suicide laboratory and his team investigates the biological underpinnings of major depression and suicide, with a particular focus on glial cells. He has published more than 100 peer-reviewed articles on research funded by CIHR, NSERC, CFI, ERA-NET NEURON, FRO-S, HBHL (CFREF) and AFSP.

“ I am thrilled to be taking on this role with Dr. Conrod. The departure of Gustavo and Alain at the head of the RQSHA leave us with very large shoes to fill, but I am confident that we will live up to expectations and add a new perspective to the Réseau. There is a vibrant scientific community in Québec that is dedicated, through a variety of research approaches, to improving the life of people who struggle with mental illness. The RQSHA has been instrumental in supporting some of this cutting-edge research, in catalyzing new collaborations and in supporting the next generation of investigators, and these roles will remain among our top priorities in the years to come.”

– Dr. Naguib Mechawar, Co-Director

A message from the new Executive Committee of the RQSHA

During this period in our history when North American society is facing a series of unprecedented health crises, the research activities of the RQSHA have become even more relevant than ever. In the decade before the COVID-19 pandemic, life expectancy rates in North America stopped increasing and began decreasing for the first time in a century, a trend which was attributed to dramatic increases in rates of drug overdoses, alcohol cirrhosis and suicide. There is also evidence that Quebec society has been somewhat spared from these recent concerning health trends and it is not hard to attribute these health gains to the exceptional research output of Quebec mental health researchers, and the support mechanisms provided by the FROQS and the RQSHA to allow for the translation of such findings into positive health outcomes for our society. The challenge for our network, and its leadership, going forward, will be to continue to support our research community in adapting to the changing socio-biologic conditions impacting on the health of our population.

As a reflection of our commitment to maintaining the relevance and agility of the RQSHA in addressing research questions and health concerns of the Quebec population, we are pleased to announce the granting of 3 exceptional research grants focused on the well-being of the population and our service providers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Congratulations to Drs. Jean Séguin (U. Montreal), Jean-Philippe Gouin (Concordia U.), and Jean-Daniel Carrier (U. Sherbrooke) for your success!

In light of the current situation we have temporarily suspended the travel awards typically offered to our students but are exploring alternative ways of supporting capacity development and training in the short term. Spring 2020 has revealed itself to be one of many changes, but we are confident that through this difficult period we will grow stronger and better together. We are looking forward to growing into this new role alongside you all.

Sincerely,

Patricia Conrod

&

Naguib Mechawar

