

## Society for the Study of Addiction (SSA) Travelling Scholarship Award report

**Dr Will Lawn**

Biological Psychiatry conference in New York: May 8<sup>th</sup> – May 14<sup>th</sup> 2018.

I received a Travelling Scholarship award of £525 from the SSA to help fund my attendance at the Biological Psychiatry conference in New York.

During the conference, I presented some of my research concerning the relationship between nicotine dependence and altered reward processing. Specifically, this study investigated differences between cigarette smokers who are dependent and those who are not, on cigarette and voucher purchasing behaviour and associated neural correlates.



Me, presenting my poster:

“Value-based decision-making of cigarettes and non-drug reward in dependent and occasional smokers: an fMRI study”.

Furthermore, I was able to attend some fascinating talks and see some great posters. I particularly enjoyed hearing the following people speak: George Koob, Yasmin Hurd, Hugh Garavan, Patrick Skosnik, Ryan Vandrey, Muhammed Parvaz, Yavin Shaham and Rita Goldstein. There was an incredible wealth of biological addiction experts at the conference.

While I was in New York, I met up with Dr Elias Dakwar, who conducts cutting-edge research into using ketamine as a treatment for cocaine and alcohol use disorders. Given my work on Dr Celia Morgan’s KARE (ketamine for reducing alcoholic relapse) trial, and my ongoing interest in using ketamine and psychedelic drugs to help treat addiction, I was keen to meet with Elias to hear about his current work and update him on my work. We met at the New York State Psychiatric Institute and had a very successful meeting. I described the work I am doing on a variety of ketamine projects (alcoholism, reward processing and neuropathic pain). Elias updated me on his current research: two major clinical trials investigating ketamine as a treatment for cocaine and alcohol use disorder have now finished and will be published shortly. We also discussed the future of ketamine and

psychedelic research, within the framework of substance use disorders, and how best to ensure it is a successful one.

I took the opportunity to network with other researchers who were in New York for the Biological Psychiatry conference. I took Dr Janna Cousijn and Dr Tim van Timmeren out for dinner (along with my colleague Chandni Hindocha). Janna Cousijn is a prolific (human) cannabis researcher, who has conducted highly-cited research about structural brain differences between cannabis users and non-users, prediction of future cannabis use from behavioural and neural outcomes, and cross-cultural differences in cannabis users. Given my current work on a large longitudinal study of adolescent and adult cannabis users (PI: Val Curran), this dinner provided an excellent opportunity to discuss recent findings and difficulties of longitudinal studies of cannabis users. Dr Tim van Timmeren is a researcher from Amsterdam who conducts translational research with humans into the importance of reward and learning processes in alcohol and gambling use disorders. Due to my PhD work in reward processing, I am very interested in Tim's research. We are hoping to conduct some collaborative work in the future on our shared interest of how critical reward processing impairments are in the development of substance use disorders.



Having dinner with Dr Janna Cousijn, Dr Tim van Timmeren and Chandni Hindocha

I am extremely grateful to the SSA for the funding I received, so that I could travel to New York and attend the Biological Psychiatry conference. The conference was brilliant – both in terms of attending the highly educational talks and also providing me with the opportunity to speak with researchers about my work. I also enjoyed meeting and networking with senior academics, specifically with Dr Elias Dakwar and Dr Janna Cousijn. I would not have been able to make the trip and attend the conference without the SSA's generous funding.



A cannabis-themed van driving around New York. Thus demonstrating the changing culture of cannabis within the United States.