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Hormonal response to alcohol can be inherited, IU study says

How a hormone called beta endorphin (B-E) responds to alcohol may help identify people whose genetic makeup puts them at increased risk of developing alcoholism. An IUSM study published in the March issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research* is the first to find that a hormonal response to alcohol can be inherited.

"Alcoholism, rather than a weakness of will, is a disease that has biological components," says the study's principal investigator, Janice Froehlich, PhD.

"While alcoholism tends to run in families, not all children of alcoholics become alcoholic. Our finding that the response of beta endorphin to alcohol is inherited, when taken together with other inherited responses, may help us identify individuals in alcoholic families who are at risk of alcoholism."

Individuals from alcoholic families have a greater beta endorphin response to alcohol. A bigger B-E response may produce a greater sense of euphoria so individuals inheriting a greater B-E response to alcohol may be more likely to drink.

The response of B-E to alcohol may represent a new biological marker that can be used to identify individuals at risk for the development of alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

Once high-risk individuals are identified, counseling can be made available and early intervention strategies for prevention of alcohol abuse can be implemented.

"Biomarkers for alcoholism may also tell us more about the physiology of alcoholism and give us information that can be used in the development of drugs to treat and prevent alcohol abuse and alcoholism," says Dr. Froehlich.

Dr. Froehlich and colleagues Ting-Kai. Li, MD, Joe Christian, MD, PhD, and Rick Zink, MS, studied 102 identical and 74 fraternal adult twins. The researchers examined four hormones. Of the four, only the

B-E response was shown to be strongly inherited.

The study was funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Briefs

Alumni weekend

The Spring Medical Alumni Weekend will be May 19-21.

Classes graduating in the years ending with a 5 or 0 will celebrate reunions.

UNICEF recognition

The IU-Moi Program has been recognized by the local chapter of UNICEF with a "Friend to the World's Children" award.

This is the first time the local chapter has presented the award and the presentation was made March 24 at the group's annual fundraiser. Accepting for the IU program, based at IUSM and Moi University in Eldoret, Kenya, was John Pless, MD, who is chairman of the IU/Kenya Development Committee.

Those interested in making a donation to the IU-Moi Program may do so by contacting Joyce Dobson at 317-630-8695.

IUSM resident publishes second medical textbook

Joel Topf, MD, a fourth-year resident at the IU School of Medicine, recently published his second medical education textbook.

He and co-author Sarah Faubel, MD, took four years to write *The Fluid, Electrolyte and Acid-Base*

Companion, which is now available at university bookstores. It "provides a simplified and systematic approach to true understanding of the fundamental forces which underlie all fields of medicine," according to the book's introduction.

Their first efforts resulted in the textbook *The Microbiology Companion*, which was written between their second and third years in medical school and published in 1993. A second edition was published in 1994 and a revised edition of the practical study guide was released in 1997. Flash cards also are available free for medical students.

Dr. Topf says the textbook project was conceived to fill gaps he experienced in his own medical education training.

"The first book is all tables, which I had developed to help me learn microbiology. The second book takes a visual approach with simple text because that was what I found helpful in tackling the topic. The endeavor was undertaken, not to make money or fill time but because it was an interesting and stimulating project and it also was something that could help others," Dr. Topf said.

As if being prolific at writing isn't enough, the pair started their own publishing company Alert and Oriented Publishing, a take-off on medical terminology for degrees of patient alertness, and they also have a Web page to sell their products.

Will there be a third medical textbook?

"That's a good question," Dr. Topf said. But first he wants to try his hand at developing computer software for doctors. He concedes that during his next educational undertaking, he might discover gaps he thinks can be filled with a textbook written from a trainee's perspective.

To browse the current selection of textbooks published by Alert and Oriented Publishing, click on <http://www.alertandonline.com>.

Dr. Topf entered the IU Combined Medicine/Pediatric residency in 1996 and will complete the program in June. He will then begin a nephrology fellowship at the University of Chicago.

Drs. Topf and Faubel completed their medical degrees in 1995 at Wayne State University. Dr. Faubel completed a residency in internal medicine at the University of Colorado and now practices in Denver.

School rises in national rankings

IUSM is among the top 50 medical schools in the United States, the U.S. News & World Report says in

its "2000 America's Best Graduate School" guide.

Of the 125 accredited medical schools in the nation, IUSM was in a four-way tie for 40th place, one notch above the school's 1999 rating. The current ranking also places the School of Medicine among the top 16 public medical schools in the country, improving from last year's 17th spot.

Sharing the 40th position with IUSM are Ohio State University, University of Cincinnati and the University of Southern California. Harvard University was ranked first in the nation.

The rankings and related stories are available on the publication's Web site at <http://www.usnews.com>.

DNA repair, immune responses topics of April Combined Seminar Series

Speakers for the final two April sessions of the Combined Seminar Series, conducted from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesdays in the IU Cancer Research Institute auditorium, include:

April 19 -- Sherrill Slichter, MD, Culbertson Lecturer 2000 Director, Research and Education, University of Washington School of Medicine Puget Sound Blood Center, Seattle, "Immunologic Responses to Transfused Platelets: Can We Prevent Them?"

April 26 -- George Iliakis, MD, professor and division director, Department of Radiation Oncology, Kimmel Cancer Center, Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, "Repair of DNA Double Strand Breaks in Eukaryotic Cells"

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