

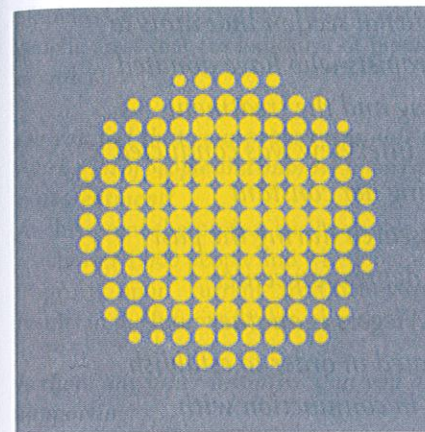
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IN NEUROSCIENCE

DEPRESSION

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Virtual Neural Circuits, Pain Modulation by NO,
Auditory Scene Analysis, The Brian Simulator,
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HOPE FOR DEPRESSION RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Location: New York, NY, USA
www.hopefordepression.org

In an interview with Frontiers a representative of the Hope for Depression Research Foundation (HDRF) describes the foundation in these terms: "The mission of HDRF is to fund cutting-edge, international scientific research into the origins, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of depression and its related mood and other emotional disorders – bipolar disorder, dysthymia, postpartum depression, post-traumatic stress syndrome, anxiety disorder and suicide – with the ultimate goal of finding a cure. HDRF sets itself apart with a pioneering approach; it has the only significantly-funded research program, public or private, that is based on affective neuroscience – integrating the fields of neuroscience (the biology of the brain) and affective science (the psychology of mood and emotions). HDRF was founded in April 2006 by Audrey Gruss in honor of her mother Hope, who suffered from clinical depression. It is a 501 (c)(3) public charity and is obligated to raise public funds to support its mission. A private foundation underwrites all of HDRF's administrative expenses, so that every dollar raised goes directly to research." Regarding HDRF current research programs related to depression, the representative underlines the fact that these funds are soon going to be published with details on the foundation website and provides Frontiers with a short highlight on them: "So far, our funding has been quite diverse," says a representative of the organization,

"Ranging from the development of various pre-clinical (animal) behavioral and neuroscience models to insightful human brain imaging for the evaluation of new treatment strategies (pharmacological, hormonal, and neural stimulation). We are also working in collaboration with international groups, such as the Institute for Affective Neuroscience in Israel, to further facilitate the growth of a new vision of how novel research strategies might have the greatest impact on the understanding and treatment of depression."

Regarding the foundation's funding process, the HDRF representative said that "in the first grant cycle, the foundation funded ten research grants, all beginning in January 2007. To date, thirty seven research grants were funded (an average of twelve per year) totaling over US\$4 million. HDRF typically funds one and two-year studies in the amount of US\$110,000 to US and internationally-based investigators who are part of established research institutions. The majority of the foundation funded investigators are based in the US." When asked to evaluate their research findings and to comment on their potential future success, the HDRF representative was very positive and underlined that HDRF strongly believes that its broad line of research holds the most promise for a major breakthrough in the science of depression and that the objective of this research will soon be achieved. "We are focusing our funding on research efforts into the brain mechanisms of attachment and separation distress, and associated mechanisms, and their role in the etiology, mechanisms, treatment and prevention of depression. This research covers the full gamut of methodologies from the genetic and molecular levels, through anatomy and chemistry, to functional imaging, brain stimulation and drug trials. Special emphasis is placed on research that integrates psychological and neurological approaches. Once we are in a position to assess the results and impact of this novel research program, we will re-evaluate and adjust our strategy," said the foundation representative and added, "the Hope for Depression Research Foundation strongly believes that depression is a multi-dimensional problem, with probably several distinct types within the unipolar category alone. Since the work we support expects investigators to address not only the neuroscientific but the affective/

mental aspects of depression concurrently, it is certain that our funded research programs will provide basic science findings upon which new therapeutics strategies can be and have to be based. We are especially interested in supporting initial clinical work to establish the utility of new concepts; for instance, we already have some new ideas for reducing suicidal ideation (a big problem in depression) in the pipeline. Still, our overall strategy is that the best ideas will emerge when we have a much deeper neuroscientific understanding of the basic affective processes of the mammalian brain."

In order to measure the progress being made by the foundation's initiative, all HDRF-funded investigators are required to submit annual progress reports and final reports describing how the funds were spent and the progress made in accomplishing the purposes of the grant, states the foundation representative. "These reports include any news articles or scientific publications reporting on the results of the study, as well as details of the progress of the study, including any internally generated reports. In addition to progress and final reports, HDRF have plans to implement a policy of requesting follow-up reports, which are intended to inform us of any new publications, grant applications and funding, additional results and progress resulting from the study since the one-year anniversary of the final report. It is still quite early in our initiative to be envisioning how the work will eventually impact treatment practices around the world" says the HDRF representative. "However, we hope that our focus on the intervening affective networks of the brain, as opposed to simply trying to link single molecules to complex psychiatric entities, will help promote a world-wide recognition of how important it is for us to conceptualize how the brain generates basic psychological processes, especially primary-process social emotions. We anticipate that a wider recognition of this often missing dimension in current research practices (i.e., the need to take an evolutionarily cogent and psychologically meaningful "network doctrine" approach) will have long-term positive impact on work in the field that will, hopefully, lead to the more rapid emergence of new and useful concepts for developing new biomedical and neuro-psychotherapeutic interventions for depression."

By Shamsa Abdulrasak