

## Minutes HASA Support meeting 8 September 2016

Guest speaker : Carla Freeman Neuro psychiatrist based at UCT Private Hospital , Groote Schuur

Carla spoke about the “triad” of symptoms: Motor symptoms, Cognitive impairment and the psychiatric behavioural aspect.

She discussed the options of Prompt diagnosis as opposed to Delayed diagnosis, with two very interesting case histories.

She explained that Huntingtons is a “sub cortical illness” which effects the planning , multitasking and organising aspects of the patients life.

- **Anxiety** impacts behaviour negatively
- **Depression** plays a major part in most patients.

Largest group of patients displaying symptoms of depression are those of  $\pm$  30 years old : coping with the news after diagnosis , the loss that comes with not driving , loss of work , giving up a range of activities and hobbies.

Suicide: huge studies in Huntingtons patients showing that the most risky period is at testing and receiving the results.

Studies have shown two “spikes” in suicide: The first were patients in the pre diagnosis group. The second “spike” was post diagnosis there was a far less risk of suicide.

Depression manifests as frustration, irritation and agitation. Depression responds very well to **medication**, which is generally well tolerated.

Therapeutic methods are not so successful depending on the level of cognitive deterioration.

**Apathy** also very common as the patient often lacks motivation and just can’t engage or get going with normal activities and this causes great frustration of the rest of the family

**Psychosis:** This is more likely to develop in younger patients, not very often and it responds very well to medication

**Cognitive impairment:** patient have difficulty paying attention, following instructions, following a set sequence or complex set of behaviours.

**Language:** difficulty with speaking, often voice distorted with slurred words. Important to understand that comprehension is usually intact, so very important to keep communicating with Huntingtons patients.

**Medication:** \* don't be afraid of medication ...it works when you get the correct one for each patient's needs. You just need to try and change the medication until you get the correct one!

Great meeting ...and no time for "housekeeping"!

We wish Jess all the best as she leaves this week for The Hague to attend the world Huntingtons Conference. Fiona from Johannesburg will be joining her there, and Fiona will be presenting a paper at the conference.

We look forward to update exciting news!

**Next Cape Town Support Group: 13 October 2016**

