Bringing Research to LIFE

Upcoming Events

MCNHR Research Seminar

Decisions! Decisions! Mental Health Triage in the Emergency Department

Tuesday, Apr. 24, 2012
12:00 to 1:00 p.m.

Room 370
Helen Glass Centre for Nursing
Fort Garry Campus

General hospital accident and emergency departments are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and are logical places for individuals experiencing mental health problems and their families to seek assistance. Triaging such individuals accurately and safely can be a challenge for nurses who often lack a sense of comfort with this population and may not have the knowledge and resources available to assist them in the triaging process. Evidence suggests that service users with mental health-related presentations may wait longer to be seen and spend longer in the emergency department than people with medical or trauma presentations.

This presentation will outline a series of studies conducted in Winnipeg through which we have sought to promote the triage nurses' decision-making abilities for individuals presenting with mental health problems through targeted education and development of an enhanced triage scale.

The Centre on Aging's Annual Dialogue on Aging

Monday, May 7, 2012
8:45 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Brodie Centre Atrium
727 McDermot Ave.
Bannatyne Campus,
University of Manitoba

To register or for more information, visit:
umanitoba.ca/centres/aging/events/384.html

The 'mother goose' myth

Researcher shares expertise gathered over more than 40 years observing first bonds between ducks, geese

Photo by Luc Desjardins

Prof. Jim Shapiro, director of the Avian Behaviour Laboratory, investigates the first bonds made among ducks and geese.

BY KATIE CHALMERS-BROOKS
For The Bulletin

They call him the Quack Doctor. It's a nickname that long-time psychology professor Jim Shapiro has grown to love.

And one he earned from studying another show of love: attachments formed between ducklings or goslings and their brothers and sisters.

It was Shapiro and his research team who discovered in the 1980s that mom doesn't typically come first in the waterfowl world. Mallard ducklings and Canada geese are more interested in forming bonds with their fellow ducklings or goslings than with their mama.

"They'll prefer each other if given a choice between their mother and their brood," says Shapiro.

It's valuable information since the more we know about bird behaviour the better they can be protected.

Shapiro's current research has him zeroing in even further on the two species, comparing their first bonds while keeping in mind their different family dynamics: geese are raised by both their mother and father, while ducks are raised by only their moms. "I would like to see if there are any long-lasting implications in the formation of attachments in those two species of birds."

Shapiro, who has been at the U of M for more than four decades, was a graduate student curious about human behaviour when he found himself being steered in the direction of the avian equivalent. "I found the birds fascinating," he says.

Literature about a phenomenon called imprinting—a term coined by well-known Austrian researcher and Nobel-prize winner Konrad Lorenz—suggested baby ducks and geese attach to the first thing they see once hatched and that was their moms.

Results in the lab by Shapiro and his students suggested otherwise: the birds saw other ducklings or goslings first and attached to them.

"That was the eureka moment," he says.

Lorenz further suggested that this bird behaviour could be applied to all species — which Shapiro disputes — and even to humans. "To generalize to humans is over generalizing," he says, noting that findings could, however, prompt related studies about human behaviour. "You may come up with an idea that you may want to test on humans and that's valid, but you're beginning fresh."

Shapiro's findings revealed that young ducks and geese put great importance on bonding with their fellow ducklings or goslings as a means of survival. It's as if they know if something were to happen to their parent, they would depend on their brood to huddle together and keep warm. Or, they recognize there is safety in numbers if a hawk were to attack the group.

"If a predator swoops down, they disperse as a group. It is a survival mechanism. Yes, one may be sacrificed but there is a survival advantage to ducklings staying together," says Shapiro, adding that they also prefer being part of a larger rather than smaller brood.

They behave no differently in the lab versus their natural environment; Shapiro has tested both.

Nowadays, to study geese he and his team need to look no further than outside their windows on campus. Springtime means Canada geese are migrating back and there is no shortage of the nuisance birds within city limits. Conservation efforts dating back to the early 1900s to save water fowl populations worked — a little too well. "This is a wonderful example of conservation that's too successful," says Shapiro, who speaks to media on a regular basis about the dangers of getting too close to these wild birds.

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