



RESEARCH NEWS

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Examining the mental health needs of our armed forces

By Frank Nolan, Research Promotion Officer

Even though Canada's armed forces have been involved in peacekeeping missions around the world for a half a century, it wasn't until very recently that researchers began looking at how these activities affect the mental health of our military personnel.

At the University of Manitoba, a project led by Jitender Sareen, psychiatry, is looking at the prevalence of mental disorders in the armed forces and the level of need for mental health services.

"I'm part of a research team that looks at post-traumatic stress, and we've done a lot of work with general population samples," Sareen said. "This is the first large military sample we've had access to, and it's the first survey where the aim was specifically to look at mental health needs in the Canadian military."

Sareen is working with data collected by Statistics Canada between 2001 and 2002. The survey of more than 8,000 members of the Canadian Forces was a supplement to a larger survey that looked at the prevalence of mental disorders in the general Canadian population, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and substance disorders.

Sareen said the Statistics Canada survey was commissioned by the Department of National Defence in

response to criticism that emotional problems are sometimes neglected by the military and that adequate services are not always available. The result, Sareen said, is one of the best military mental health surveys in the world, with data collected through diagnostic, face-to-face interviews, rather than simply self-report questionnaires.

Sareen, who has published several papers on perceived need in the general population, became interested in looking at the military after hearing Romeo Dallaire speak at a conference about his experiences in Rwanda. He began the project last year with funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

The first stage involved analyzing the data to determine the impact of peacekeeping activities on the mental health of the peacekeepers themselves.

"There's been a lot of interest in whether or not these activities lead to increases in things like anxiety disorders, suicidal tendencies, and so on," Sareen said. "The situation in Rwanda was one example, but there has been significant controversy over this, since Rwanda was a very specific experience, and some other studies have not found that peacekeeping in general has a negative effect on soldiers."



Jitender Sareen, Psychiatry

Photo by: Frank Nolan

The second part of Sareen's study is examining self-perceived need for mental health services, or whether or not individuals think they need help for emotional problems. The team is also looking at the kinds of barriers that military personnel might face, including the fear of stigmatization, and whether or not people have confidence in the services available to them.

"The aim is to look at how common things like depression and post-traumatic stress disorder are,

and how many of these people are actually getting the full level of service they think they need," he said. "Our hypothesis is that there are unmet needs in this population, and if that turns out to be the case, we hope that our findings might eventually impact policy."

Sareen plans to present his findings at a symposium in Toronto this November as part of the Canadian Psychiatric Association annual conference.

Industrial Technology Centre opens at Smartpark

By Frank Nolan, Research Promotion Officer

On May 5, the Industrial Technology Centre (ITC) officially opened its new location at Smartpark, and representatives from the Province of Manitoba, the University of Manitoba and local industry took part in an opening ceremony and tour of its state-of-the-art facilities.

Established in 1979, ITC is a Special Operating Agency of Manitoba Energy, Science and Technology that provides manufacturers, businesses and institutions with a wide range of technical services.

Its new 18,800 square foot building at 78 Innovation Drive includes a comprehensive fabrication shop, mechanical testing and calibration laboratories, a technical library, advanced document examination capabilities, and a world-class Virtual Reality Centre.

It also houses the only laboratory in Western Canada for examining lottery tickets, including the detection of forgeries and alterations, as well as

quality control testing.

ITC's chief operating officer, Trevor Cornell, said the move will allow ITC to expand the partnerships it has built with local manufacturers over the last quarter century.

"This new location gives us a new beginning and many more opportunities for closer collaboration with our partners from the University of Manitoba, Smartpark and Industry," Cornell said.

"As a focal point for advanced manufacturing and materials, ITC will be an important resource, both for the advanced technology organizations already at Smartpark and for the University of Manitoba," said Joanne Keselman, vice-president (research) at the University of Manitoba.

"ITC's Virtual Reality Centre is already proving to be a valuable resource, and many of our students have had an opportunity to visit the centre to learn more about advanced simulation techniques," she added.

The opening ceremony included an announcement by John Clarkson, Deputy Minister of Energy, Science and Technology for the Province of Manitoba, of \$125,000 in new funding for a pilot project linking ITC with the Manitoba Institute of Cell Biology (MICB), a joint institute of the University of Manitoba and

CancerCare Manitoba.

The pilot project will give MICB researchers remote access to ITC's Virtual Reality Centre, allowing them to use the Centre's advanced visualization technology to create and manipulate three-dimensional images of cells and cell structures.



Photo by Frank Nolan

ITC's opening event included a demonstration of the Virtual Reality Centre.

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