



Victorian Brain Bank Network

Introduction

The Victorian Brain Bank Network (VBBN) is located at the Mental Health Research Institute (MHRI) and has the function of collecting post-mortem human brains from individuals who have had neurological and psychiatric diseases.

The VBBN is part of the Australian Brain Bank Network (ABBN), which is a consortium of brain banks across Australia that are collecting post-mortem human brain tissue. By collaborating on this process, the ABBN provides Australian and international researchers with clinically and neuropathologically well-characterised human brain tissue on which they can conduct research to further our understanding of the causes of neurological and psychiatric conditions and to develop more effective diagnostic tools and treatments for these conditions.

“By encouraging interested persons to make a post mortem brain donation, the resource centre offers the donor the opportunity to aid medical research.”

Why brain tissue is needed for research into neurological and psychiatric disorders

Many conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, bipolar mood disorder, depression, Huntington's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, schizophrenia and other neurological and psychiatric conditions affect only humans.

Brains from people affected with these illnesses are essential for research devoted to finding treatments and cures.

Why tissue from normal brains is needed

Progress can be made towards finding the cause of neurological and psychiatric conditions if researchers can compare brains from those affected to those who were not affected by such conditions. Unaffected spouse or family members may also consider registering as donors.

“The exact nature of the research performed on the brain tissue will depend on the researchers needs, as continuing advances in technology allow for a wider range of scientific research.”

What brain donation involves

The post mortem examination is an orderly procedure supervised by a pathologist. Ideally the procedure should take place within 24 hours after death but can take place for up to 72 hours.

The brain is processed in two ways to allow maximum information to be obtained and to ensure the tissue is usable in research for many years to come. Half the tissue is frozen and used for research. The remaining tissue is fixed in formalin and allows for both neuropathologic diagnosis and research.

Researchers will only be able to access stored tissue and clinical information after obtaining approval from their institution's Human Research Ethics Committee and the VBBN Scientific Advisory Committee for their research projects. This is to ensure the tissue is used ethically and is only

provided to feasible research projects with scientific merit.

Diagnosis of neurological & Psychiatric Disorders

Examination of the brain after death enables clinicians and researchers to accurately diagnose the illness that the donor may have suffered and support research into these illnesses. A report stating the final diagnosis is sent to the donor's doctor and is available for the senior available Next of Kin to discuss with the doctor. Occasionally post mortem diagnoses are different to those made whilst the donor was alive and could have only been made after a post mortem examination of the donor's brain.

“It is important to make the necessary arrangements well in advance, since family members need time to discuss this very important issue. Ultimately, the senior available Next of Kin will be responsible for making sure the donor's wishes are fulfilled.”

This is particularly important for those in whom the neurological disease may have a hereditary or familial association. If a family member has such a disease, this program may then be relevant for a child or grandchild at risk of developing the disorder.

Donor Privacy

Donor information is kept private and confidential. Once the donation has occurred, the tissue is stored securely at the VBBN based in Parkville and is identified only by a unique identification number. Donor details are held securely on computer and in locked files at a separate location to ensure confidentiality.

Researchers have access to the tissue and clinical information only through the unique identification number. No donor is ever identified by name in any publications or presentations that result from the research.

Further Information

If you would like more information about the Victorian Brain Bank Network and the Mental Health Research Institute, contact:

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Relevant permission forms and instructions are available to organise the necessary arrangements to donate.

The senior partners in the VBBN are the MHRI, The University of Melbourne, Neurosciences Victoria and the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine.

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