Christopher Bowie (Psychology) has received a national award for his program that helps people with a mental illness function at a high level when they return to work.

“Many people with mental illness experience improvements in their primary symptoms after treatment, such as low mood in the case of depression,” says Dr. Bowie. “Still, many continue to have challenges with cognitive abilities like memory and attention. Work is one area that tends to be a residual challenge and, not surprisingly, the persistence of cognitive difficulties is a strong predictor of how well people do when they return to work—and how they feel about their work.”

In response to this challenge, Dr. Bowie developed the Action-Based Cognitive Remediation program, which earned him the Psychiatry Research Award from Pfizer Canada, Healthy Minds Canada and Sun Life Mutual. He is one of only three doctors across Canada to earn the award this year.

“Dr. Bowie’s research demonstrating the effectiveness of psychological treatments for the improvement of cognitive function in patients with mental illness continues to be at the forefront of mental health treatment strategies and is one of the leading clinical research programs in the Department of Psychology,” says Richard Beninger, Head of the Department of Psychology. “Dr. Bowie is among the world’s leading researchers on the use of psychological treatments in psychiatric illness.”

Cognitive remediation involves retraining the brain using specialized treatment methods in order to improve memory and attention skills. Cognitive remediation alone is often insufficient for many people who have an episode of mental illness because they experience a disruption to their skills and a loss of confidence in their abilities. Dr. Bowie’s Action-Based Cognitive Remediation builds on the stimulation of brain activity brought on by cognitive remediation by pairing it with actual work behaviours.

In one example, participants engage in a computer activity that trains their ability to visually search for a
complex looking object amongst a number of similar distracting items. Then, to make the training applicable in the real world, they turn their chair around and use the skills they just worked on to engage in work-associated behaviours, such as searching for a specific file, or scanning a shelf for the precise type of material needed for a task.

“Workplace depression is associated with reduced quality of life and lost productivity in society,” says Dr. Bowie. “We hope to challenge that by putting the treatment of cognitive remediation in an everyday context that we hope will reduce anxiety, improve confidence and result in a more satisfying work life for the millions of people suffering from depression.”

For more information on the award visit the website.

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