Researchers at the Institute of Living are discovering that the eyes are the windows to unraveling the neurological mysteries of mental health disorders.

“It’s really true what they say, that you can see a lot by looking into someone’s eyes,” said Jimmy Choi, a researcher at the IOL’s Olin Neuropsychiatry Research Center and Schizophrenia Rehabilitation Program who recently led a pioneering treatment study in the field of pupillometry, which involves the measurement of pupil diameter in psychology.

The study, which was published in August in the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal, marked the culmination of extensive research into how pupillometry can help with neurofeedback cognitive training in gauging the brain functions of those with schizophrenia or other neurologic disorders.

Choi said the study of pupils in the context of psychiatry has been around for about two decades, but is just beginning to pay off in terms of providing a solid understanding of how the brain can be trained to help overcome symptoms of a disorder.

Advances in technology are making it possible to provide highly accurate scans of the pupil as mental health patients are tested in cognitive functions, Choi said. Devices known as pupillometers can measure the dilation or contraction of the pupils as patients are asked to work on specialized material on computer or tablet screens.

If the pupil shows signs of dilation, Choi said, it can be an indication that the patient is experiencing an overload of information and may become frus-
Last week the U.S. Centers for Disease Control came out with alarming statistics showing that more than 50,000 people have died from drug-related overdoses this year — more than the number of people killed in car crashes or from gun violence. The only cause of death that claimed more lives this year was heart disease, serving as an urgent reminder to all of us that this crisis is not going away, despite our best efforts.

As you know, we here in the Behavioral Health Network have taken an aggressive, comprehensive and multidimensional approach to addressing this crisis in Connecticut, which has seen more than 800 overdose-related deaths this year, a record. We have expanded resources and access to treatment while taking a leading role in educating providers about the dangers of overprescribing opioid pain medications, working closely with legislative leaders at the state and federal level and participating in numerous community forums across the state.

As we embark on a new year, I think we need to redouble our efforts by putting a special focus on the families of those who are suffering not just from substance use disorders but from all types of mental health issues. Over the last year, I have taken countless phone calls from family members desperate to help loved ones who are suffering from all kinds of behavioral health issues, and eager to learn about the most effective treatments as well as the latest research.

Education and outreach are going to continue to be critical to our ability to bring relief to families and help get more people on a path of recovery. We recognize that the disease of addiction often goes hand in hand with mental health disorders, which is why it will also be crucial for us to make sure we are not isolating substance abuse treatment resources from mental health resources. This will be one of my top priorities in 2017, and I urge all of you to think of your individual roles within the broader context of behavioral health treatment as we create a culture that recognizes the overall needs of our patients.

What this means in a practical sense is that, in the course of doing your work, you should make every effort to consider the needs and anxieties of the families of those you are caring for. To help meet that goal, leadership across the BHN will be working to create models for helping families feel more involved in the care their loved ones are receiving.

I would like to thank all of you for the outstanding work you have done this year in helping the BHN emerge as statewide leader in providing the most effective, compassionate care to patients suffering from addiction and other forms of behavioral health issues. It has been a grim year in many respects, and we must do more if we want 2017 to be better for patients and their families. But you should be proud of how far we have come in just 12 months.

Pat Rehmer, MSN, ACHE, is Hartford HealthCare senior vice president for behavioral health and president of the Behavioral Health Network. Her column appears monthly in BHNews.

Pupil dilation and contraction cannot be consciously controlled

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trated with the test and decide to quit. On the other hand, if the pupils begin to contract, it can be a sign that the material is too easy, and the patient may lose interest, he said.

“Pupillometry really helps us find that sweet spot where the subject is operating at the highest level of cognitive functioning,” he said. By maintaining cognitive focus over a longer period of time, he said, patients can learn to train their brains to overcome symptoms of their disorder.

“It’s like practicing at a sport,” he said.

Pupillometric technology is becoming more commonplace throughout society, and even can be found in handheld reading tablets and other widely used platforms, Choi said. He said the technology is being used to replace the password codes that enable people to log in to their devices; instead of using a numerical code, the technology simply scans the user’s pupils. Similarly, the technology is being used to scan a tablet-user’s eyes as they scroll down a page of text; when the reader gets to the bottom of the page, the technology reads the pupils and automatically switches the screen to the next page.

It’s also being used more frequently in the law enforcement community as a more reliable way to determine if someone is telling the truth, he said.

“Unlike other functions, the dilation or the contraction of the pupils cannot be consciously controlled, so it’s a valuable tool for law enforcement agencies including the FBI,” he said.
Dr. Schwartz appears on CBS News to discuss Sandy Hook aftermath

Harold I. (Hank) Schwartz, MD, psychiatrist-in-chief for the Institute of Living, appeared on the CBS Evening News on Wednesday, Dec. 14 to discuss the four-year anniversary of the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School and the lessons that have been learned in the aftermath.

Dr. Schwartz, who co-authored a comprehensive report on the shootings released in 2014, commented on a video that was created by Sandy Hook Promise showing how easy it can be to miss the warning signs of young people who are contemplating carrying out a mass shooting. Twenty-six people were killed in the 2012 Sandy Hook shootings, including 20 first-graders.

“For schoolchildren, we need to try to end the code of silence,” Dr. Schwartz commented, referring to the reluctance that some young people feel to report signs of troubling behavior on the part of their peers.

The video is being used to help educate young people on how to recognize the signs of a potential shooter. On the surface, the video tells the story of a teenager who has developed a crush on another student, but in the background there is another student who is experiencing the social isolation and revenge fantasies that can lead to a shooting incident.


U.S. reports more than 50,000 overdose-related deaths in 2016

More than 50,000 Americans died from drug overdoses last year, the most ever, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. And leaders within the Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network, which has taken a multi-dimensional approach to tackling the problem across Connecticut, say the toll is impacting every level of society.

“This epidemic has built up over time and gotten worse, and it will take people working collaboratively — providers, police, first responders and family members — to hopefully push back on the rising use of opioids,” said Patricia Rehmer, Hartford HealthCare senior vice president and president of the Behavioral Health Network.

“The opioid overdose crisis is not going away and may be getting worse,” said J. Craig Allen, MD, medical director at Rushford. “In the state of Connecticut, we are on track to have over 800 opioid related overdose deaths this year, more than three times the number of deaths from traffic accidents, and this is occurring despite the state’s declared fight against the epidemic.”

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control said heroin deaths in the United States rose 23 percent in one year, to 12,989, slightly higher than the number of gun homicides, according to data released last week.

Deaths from synthetic opioids, including illicit fentanyl, rose 73 percent to 9,580. And prescription painkillers took the highest toll, but posted the smallest increase. Abuse of drugs like Oxycontin and Vicodin killed 17,536, an increase of 4 percent.

“I don’t think we’ve ever seen anything like this. Certainly not in modern times,” said Robert Anderson, who oversees death statistics at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Dr. Allen said the problem is complex and demands a comprehensive approach that combines enhanced access to effective treatment and increased education.

“There is no one strategy that will be effective,” he said. “Hartford HealthCare’s multidimensional approach including prevention work in the community, improved access to treatment with our MATCH clinics, overdose prevention through opioid overdose education and naloxone distribution and professional education for safe opioid prescribing and alternative approaches to pain management are some of the examples of what it will take to make inroads. Hopefully, statewide, similar programs proposed by the Alcohol Drug Policy Council will help put an end to the tragic loss of human life.”

About BHNews

BHNews is published every other Friday. Story ideas or submissions may be sent to matt.burgard@hhchealth.org or amanda.nappi@hhchealth.org. Articles must be submitted as a Word document. Every effort will be made to run the article in its entirety, but due to space constraints and style requirements, editing may be necessary.
IOL researcher receives award for pioneering work

David Glahn, Ph.D, director of Affective Disorders and Psychosis Laboratory in the Olin Neuropsychiatry Research Center at the Institute of Living, has received the prestigious Joel Elkes Research Award from the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP) for his contributions to understanding the roles of genomics and biomarkers in the neurobiology of those with mental illness.

The award is given annually to scientists under the age of 50 who have made outstanding clinical contributions to neuropsychopharmacology. The contribution may be based on a single discovery or a cumulative body of work. Dr. Glahn received a monetary award and a plaque at the ACNP Annual Meeting in Hollywood, Fla., Dec. 4-8.

“As someone who has been in this field for several years, I recognize the enormous contributions made by those who have received this award previously; it is an honor to be counted among them,” said Dr. Glahn, who joined the IOL in 2008. He praised the staff of researchers at the Olin center, including director Godfrey Pearlson, MD, for supporting his research efforts over the years, as well as IOL Psychiatrist-in-Chief Harold I. (Hank) Schwartz, MD.

“You don’t win an award like this without the support and collaboration of the team of people around you, and I would like to thank all of my colleagues,” he said.

Dr. Glahn was given the award for the role he has played in advancing the potential of genomic sequencing in evaluating the brain functions of those with mental health disorders, and identifying biomarkers that can be targeted for treatment. He has published over 200 papers and reviews in leading scientific journals, and leads a number of research grants funded by the National Institutes of Health.

BrainDance Awards for Student Projects on Mental Illness

The Institute of Living at Hartford Hospital is sponsoring an academic and art competition designed to decrease the stigma of mental illness. The BrainDance Awards encourage high school students to gain knowledge about psychiatric diseases and develop a more tolerant and realistic perspective toward people with severe psychiatric problems. The competition also aims to promote students’ interest in careers in mental health care. New this year: A panel discussion featuring different mental health disciplines. To receive a BrainDance Award, a student must submit an academic project or an art project on themes related to severe mental illness. Projects must be submitted using a flash drive or dropbox format only (W/LMP files or project files are not accepted). Acceptable video formats are WMV or MPEG 4. Awards up to $1,000 will be given to the best submissions.

The projects will be judged by expert clinicians and researchers in the field, based on:

• Relevance to the issue of stigma
• Creativity
• Accuracy of information
• Scientific rigor

Projects on any theme related to severe mental illness will be considered for an award.

The categories are: Academic, Art, and Mixed Media. All applicants, their teachers, families and classmates will be invited to an awards day celebration hosted by the Institute of Living on April 27, 2017. This day is designed to be an educational extension opportunity and will include a lecture by a national expert on mental illness, an awards presentation, a visit to our Myths, Minds & Medicine museum on the history of mental healthcare and a tour of our neuro-imaging research center and a panel of experts in the mental health field. Winners are encouraged to present a brief synopsis summarizing their projects. The student lecture and presentations are designed so all participants can cite their BrainDance projects on future school or job applications.

To apply for the awards: please log on to www.nrc-iol.org and follow the link to BrainDance for application forms, information and procedures. Submission deadline is February 1, 2017.

The awards are coordinated by: Godfrey Pearlson, MD, Director, Olin Neuropsychiatry Research Center and Nancy Hubbard, LCSW, Director, Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

For more information: contact Nancy Hubbard at 860.545.7665 or nancy.hubbard@hhchealth.org

Bake Sale today at IOL

The Institute of Living will be holding a Holiday Bake Sale today — Friday, Dec. 16 — from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in the lobby of the Donnelly Building. All proceeds will benefit the Donnelly 3 North inpatient unit.

The bake sale includes a wide variety of goodies as well as a raffle.
Family Resource Center Support Groups

The IOL Family Resource Center (FRC) holds regular support groups. For additional information, please contact the FRC at 860.545.7665 or 860.545.1888. All programs are free of charge and, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Massachusetts Cottage, First Floor Group Room at the IOL Campus, 200 Retreat Ave., Hartford. The upcoming IOL FRC Support Group schedule is as follows:

- **Support Group For Those Coping With A New Or Chronic Medical Condition.** Dec. 16, 23, 30 (Every Friday), 1-2 p.m. in the Center Building, First Floor Conference Room. For young adults ages 17-26 struggling with a new diagnosis, chronic medical conditions, physical symptoms or limitations. The group will help with difficult losses and limitation due to a medical condition, and build a positive, future-oriented focus with realistic goals. To RSVP, please call Elizabeth Alve-Hedegaard, APRN, at 860.545.7050.

- **Depression Bipolar Support Alliance Group (DBSA).** Dec. 19 (Every Monday), noon – 1 p.m. in the Todd Building, Bunker Room and Nov. 23, 30, Dec. 7, 14, 21, 28 (Every Wednesday), 7 – 8 p.m. in the Commons Building, 2nd Floor, Litchfield Room. Peer run support group for those who have been diagnosed with depression or bipolar disorder.

- **Alcoholics Anonymous.** Dec. 20, 27 (Every Tuesday), 12:30-1:30 p.m. Join us for coffee and a one-hour topic discussion. To learn more, contact the AA General Service Office at 212-870-3400 or P.O. Box 459, New York, NY 10163.

- **Al-Anon Parent Group.** Dec. 22, 26 (Every Thursday), 7 – 8 p.m. One hour topic discussion.

- **Schizophrenia: An Introduction To The Disorder.** Dec. 20, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This program is for family and friends of individuals who have schizophrenia or a related disorder. It will present a basic understanding of the disorder, its treatment, along with suggestions to help family members and friends cope with the illness.

- **Yoga.** Dec. 27, 5 - 6 p.m. in the Commons Building, Hartford Room. Open to adult staff and family members. To RSVP or inquire, call the FRC at 860.545.7716 or email patriciac.graham@hhchealth.org

- **Social Support Group — LGBTQ Issues (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Questioning).** Dec. 28 (Second and fourth Wednesday of each month), 5 – 6:15 p.m. in the Center Building, Young Adult Service Group Room. Support group for 16- to 23-year-olds who identify LGBTQ issues as being prominent in their lives. The goal is to discuss support strategies to manage life challenges.

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Staff gives to annual campaign

Thank you to the 27 Natchaug staff members who have participated in the Annual Campaign and given donations totaling $5,336.

There’s still time to make your contribution, which will help our clients and the programs that are helping them recover. As a reminder, all donations stay local to Natchaug programs and services and no donation goes towards wages or salaries.

There are still two more opportunities to win Amazon or mystery gift cards. Send your donation to sherry.smardon@hhchealth.org by Monday, Dec. 19, to be eligible for the last two drawings!

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Enfield Carolers sing tonight at Blair Manor

On Friday, Dec. 16, the Joshua Center Enfield Leaders Club will perform Christmas carols at Blair Manor Nursing Home. After singing with the residents, the students will visit with the residents and play bingo. The tradition is something that both the residents and students look forward to.
Kuhn celebrates clients, staff at annual holiday party

Kuhn Employment Services, which works with Rushford community support services to help connect clients with employment opportunities, celebrated the holidays with its annual Winter Client Awards Celebration earlier this month, congratulating clients on a successful year of progress and recognizing the work done by staff to assist them.

The party, which took place Dec. 2 at Meriden Public Library, included special recognition for Rushford community support specialist Joel Kirkland, who received the annual Kuhn-Rushford Community Support Award for his dedication to clients.

Kuhn staff had this to say about Joel: “There is not a day that goes by that Joel does not have a friendly greeting to all of the people he comes across. His sense of community is genuine. He always strives to be better. He is fun, compassionate, smart and gracious. He’s a huge asset to our Kuhn clients, to us at Kuhn and to the Rushford organization.”

The celebration also featured many other awards that were given to clients, as well as participation from staff including event chairperson Sarah Kimball; Beth Fisher, Kuhn executive director; Jerry Brennan, Kuhn chief financial officer; and Jessica Matyka, Rushford clinical crisis supervisor/manager.

New treatment center meets need in Avon

More than 40 clinical providers, members of the public and representatives from area behavioral health organizations showed up for an Open House at Rushford’s new adult outpatient behavioral health treatment center in Avon on Dec. 6.

Rushford staff members led visitors on tours and explained the location’s services while offering refreshments and giveaways at the new location at 35 Tower Lane, which specializes in treating mental health and substance abuse disorders — including treatment for opioid and heroin abuse, which has reached epidemic levels across the state and the country.

The Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network, which includes Rushford, has been offering expanded services for evidence-based treatment as part of the MATCH program, which stands for Medication Assisted Treatment Close to Home.

Kuhn Employment Services, which celebrates clients, staff at annual holiday party

Melissa Monroe, left, Rushford clinical supervisor, meeting with an area behavioral health representative

Kuhn Employment Services celebrated the holidays with its annual Winter Client Awards Celebration earlier this month. Above: Participants take part in a game of bingo. Right: Event Chairperson Sarah Kimball dressed festively for the occasion.
The Treasure Trove is a free classified ad section for the benefit of Behavioral Health Network employees, retirees, medical staff and volunteers.

We welcome your submissions, which you can submit by emailing matt.burgard@hhchealth.org or amanda.nappi@hhchealth.org. The deadline for submissions to be included in each Friday’s BHNews is Tuesday at noon. BHNews will include community events for not-for-profit organizations that are open to the public and free of charge.

We do not accept ads for real estate, firearms or personal ads.

FOR SALE

WANTED
MAGAZINES/CHILDREN’S BOOKS — Used children’s hardcover books and used magazines in good condition for the Backus Hospital waiting rooms and Backus offsite locations. Please drop off the items at the Backus Gift Shop through the end of the year.

Please contact Ginny in Communications at 860.889.8331, ext. 4211 for additional information.

EVENTS
DOWNTOWN MICH CHRISTMAS PARTY — Saturday, Dec. 17, 7-9 p.m. at Christ Episcopal Church, 78 Washington St., Norwich. $5 donation or two cans of non-perishable food items for the Food Pantry.

CHRISTMAS COOKIE SALE — Saturday, Dec. 17 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Holy New Martyrs Orthodox Church, 364 Canterbury Tpke., Norwich. Fancy and favorite cookies, assorted tins, assorted trays, frozen Pierogi, stuffed cabbage, holiday baskets, gifts.

SINGING GROUP — Every Tuesday from 7-8:30 p.m. at Christ Episcopal Church, 78 Washington St., Norwich. No fee, voluntary donation only. Call 860.237.1887.

GRISWOLD REC PROGRAM — Every Tuesday and Thursday from 6-7 p.m. at the Griswold Elementary School cafeteria. Low impact aerobics, weights, Pilates. Bring mats and water. Call 860.376.4741.

Financial assistance available for patients

Do you know a patient who is in need of financial assistance? Hartford HealthCare can provide help to patients in need. Learn more about the program at https://intranet.hartfordhealthcare.org/inside-hhc/patient-support.

Addiction does not care about age.

That’s why Hartford HealthCare’s Behavioral Health Network now offers Medication Assisted Treatment Close to Home (MATCH™) for people as young as 16 years old who are struggling with opioids or other addictions. MATCH™ utilizes Suboxone® or other medications, along with relapse prevention support, and offers convenient, flexible schedules for working professionals or students. Teens seeking help for addiction also have access to a multitude of other resources including residential treatment and the evidence-based Seven Challenges® Program for adolescent substance use.

Call 1.855.825.4026
hhcbehavioralhealth.org

Rushford/Natchaug Holiday Party

Saturday, Jan. 7 • 6-11 p.m.
Saint Clements Castle • 1931 Portland-Cobalt Road • Portland, CT 06480

Get ready for a great night of dancing and capturing beautiful memories. Includes photo booth, DJ and cash bar.

Choices of Entrees include:
• Southern Crusted Salmon in an orange marmalade reduction (may contain nuts)
• Vegetarian Lasagna
• Chicken Francaise with Romano Locatelli, lemon and capers
• Grilled Angus Sirloin with Barolo and caramelized shallots

Please have your entrée choices ready when purchasing tickets.

Tickets on sale now
$10 per person. Staff plus one (18 or older) “cash only”

See Annie Cruz or Sheila Costelin for tickets

Have you heard the news?

Introducing Hartford HealthCare’s news hub

Hartford HealthCare’s new online health news site delivers lively, informative and useful health news in a whole new way. Look for print, video and audio stories produced by HHC’s News Service, as well as timely tips on nutrition, fitness, health and wellness, and medical innovations.

Don’t miss a single story! Read the latest health news or sign up for our e-newsletter at healthnewshub.org