

MEDIA RELEASE

12 September, 2011

INTERNATIONAL AWARDS FOR SERVICES TO AUTISM

The first Asia Pacific Autism Awards have been announced. The awards recognise outstanding service to the field of Autism.

The winners were announced at the Asia Pacific Autism Conference dinner in Perth on September 9. The conference, featuring keynote speakers from America, England, Belgium, Sweden, Kuwait, Singapore, India and Australia and more than 1,300 attendees from 22 countries, was held in Perth on September 8, 9 and 10. It was the largest gathering this year of international experts on autism.

Ms Joan McKenna Kerr, the CEO of the Autism Association of Western Australia, announced the winners at the dinner. The association hosted the conference. The Western Australian Government was the principal sponsor of the conference.

In presenting the awards, Ms McKenna Kerr said: "One of the striking things about the field of Autism is that we rarely celebrate or formally acknowledge leaders whose vision and work has contributed to where we are today. We don't tell the stories of and celebrate, for example, those academics who not only contribute greatly to the field but also give an enormous amount back to the Autism community; advocates who work relentlessly to change for the better the everyday experience of Autism; and those special clinicians and educators who dedicate their career to supporting people with Autism and their families, and do it in a very special way. Well, we're going to change all that. We are recognising five individuals from different fields of endeavour, who have generously given back to the Autism community in the Asia Pacific region in different and outstanding ways."

The winners are:

Australia: Dr Lawrence Bartak

Dr Bartak is Senior Psychologist at the Developmental Disabilities Clinic at Monash Medical Centre, Melbourne, Victoria. He has worked with Professor Sir Michael Rutter for 10 years at the University of London, Institute of Psychiatry, and as Director of the Monash Institute of Child and Adolescent Studies, Monash University. Dr Bartak was Visiting Professor in the Faculty of Education, University of Kyushu, Japan, and is currently an Associate of the Faculty of Education, Monash University.

Dr Bartak was an Honorary Senior Research Fellow with Professor Patricia Howlin at St George's Hospital Medical School, London, and a Senior Consultant Psychologist with Dr Lorna Wing and Dr Judith Gould at Elliot House in the UK. He is a Past President of the Autism Council of Australia and Chairperson of its Professional Advisory Committee, as well as Past President of Autism Victoria. Dr Bartak has published and contributed to many publications and is currently collaborating on a book on forensic aspects of Autism Spectrum Disorders.

India: Merry Barua

Ms Barua is an activist, special educator and parent to Neeraj, her son with Autism. Merry started the Autism movement in India, when lack of information and misconceptions about the condition abounded. She started the first specialist school, initiated a teacher training course, started the journal Autism Network, facilitated the start of services across South Asia and brought about legislative change. Merry writes, teaches, lobbies, trains, sensitizes, counsels and advocates for equal rights for people with Autism in India.

Singapore: Denise Phua

Denise is a Member of Parliament in Singapore, a special needs volunteer and parent to a son with Autism. She is President of the Autism Resource Centre in Singapore and co-founder of the Pathlight School, Singapore's first special school for children with Autism, where she helped develop many of the school's programs. As a volunteer she founded WeCAN, a charity which helps caregivers of people with Autism and provides early intervention to preschoolers. As a Member of Parliament for the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) she has focussed on developing programs for the disabled and special needs communities in Singapore.

United Kingdom: Professor Patricia Howlin

Patricia Howlin is Professor of Clinical Child Psychology at the Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College, London. She is a chartered clinical psychologist with a Ph.D in Psychology and a Fellow of the British Psychological Society. Although her research interests principally focus on autism she has been involved in research on other neurodevelopmental disorders such as Williams syndrome, developmental language disorders and Fragile X, and more recently other syndromes such as Cornelia de Lange, Angelman and Cri du Chat. She has conducted evaluations of a variety of different intervention programs, including comparative studies of home and school-based treatments, control trials of communication training programs and longer term studies of the impact of early interventions.

Patricia is Past Chair of the UK Association of Child Psychology and Psychiatry. She is a Specialist Councillor for the National Autistic Society, a member of the NAS Ethics Committee, and Trustee of the affiliated Inge Wakehurst Trust. She is on the editorial board of a number of scientific journals and has published widely in the field of autism and other genetic and developmental disorders.

A special award was presented to Dr Hugh Cook, of Western Australia, a leading child and adolescent psychiatrist, who very early on in his career developed an interest in Pervasive Development Disorders. In announcing the award, Ms McKenna Kerr said: "Dr Cook is widely respected not just for his expertise in clinical management but also for the very supportive way he works with people with Autism and their families. To say that he gives enormously of his time to the field of Autism is an understatement. I met him for the first time over 20 years ago when we both sat on a Health Department Committee of Inquiry, reviewing support services for people with Autism. Working with the Autism Association of Western Australia, he developed our sessional clinics for adults with complex needs, working with two other psychiatrists. Collaborating with others is something that seems to come easily to him. His modesty, collegiality, respect for all team members regardless of their position and a social ethos of service to others are hallmarks of everything he does. As a working psychiatrist in clinical practice, he has made and continues to make an invaluable contribution to the field of Autism in Western Australia.

Media inquiries: Michael Gillies Smith +61 (0)402 011 503 or michael@gilliesmith.com

Autism Association of Western Australia

Our mission is to advance the personal development, equality of opportunity and community participation of people with Autism. The Autism Association of Western Australia is a not-for-profit organisation. It has a staff of 450 and provides support to more than 2,200 children and adults with autism and their families in Western Australia. It is the only specialist Autism organisation in Australia providing a full range of services to people with Autism from infancy to and throughout adulthood. It works with a range of service providers in Western Australia. It is only one of five agencies in the world providing specialist services to help people with Autism gain and maintain employment.

More at www.autism.org.au