

Get your head around the brain at University showcase

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With Alzheimer's and stroke high on the list of national health concerns, the University of Birmingham is launching a major public showcase of its cutting-edge research to help people understand how the brain works, and to find out what is being done to combat some of the major neurological threats.

Top scientists and academics from across the University will inspire the next generation of scientists and improve public understanding of the brain through a variety of demonstrations and discussions for the 16th annual International Brain Awareness Week.

Every March, this global campaign unites the efforts of universities, hospitals, patient groups, government agencies, schools, service organisations, and professional associates worldwide, to increase awareness of the progress and benefits of neurological research in a week-long celebration of the brain, which this year takes place between 14-20 March 2011.

The University of Birmingham has organised a series of events to engage public understanding of neuroscience, demonstrating the breadth and depth of brain expertise on campus, whilst making the research accessible to the general public.

Leading academics will deliver a week of evening lectures, taking place at Thinktank Theatre, exploring the following four areas:

- Epilepsy – activity seizing the brain
- Stroke – seeing the damage and helping the recovery
- Ataxias – motor dysfunctions of the small brain
- Robots – what they tell us about brain and intelligence

Teams of neuroscientists will also be visiting local secondary schools and delivering lunchtime presentations on a variety of neuroscience projects aimed at captivating the next generation of scientists.

The week-long celebration will culminate with the Festival of Neurosciences on Saturday 19 March, with a day of activities, displays and public demonstrations to bring the excitement of scientific progress to the public. Themes which will be explored include: illusions and realities of pain, eating your food and liking it and can we believe all that we see?

Event organiser, Dr Emil Toescu, a Senior Lecturer in Neuroscience at the School of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, commented:

“Following on the success of last year’s events, the range of Brain Awareness Week activities at the University of Birmingham has been expanded. It is my intention that, with the help of local neuroscientists and undergraduate and postgraduate students, we will provide an opportunity for the public at large to become more knowledgeable and aware of the biological basis of various neurological disorders and what we, the research community, are doing to address them.

“The Festival of science in the last day of the week will aim at reaching the whole of the community, providing hands-on experience, demonstrations and the possibility of direct discussions with neuroscientists, aimed at the young, old and everyone in between.”

National Brain Awareness Week is taking place from 14-20 March 2011. The University of Birmingham’s public lectures are all free to attend and will be held at the Thinktank Theatre, Millennium Point from 6.30-9pm. The Festival of Neuroscience on Saturday 19 March will also be held at Thinktank from 12-4pm.

For more information, please contact Dr Emil Toescu via tel: 0121 414 6927 or e.c.toescu@bham.ac.uk (<mailto:e.c.toescu@bham.ac.uk>).

Notes to Editors

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One of the demonstrations taking place at the Festival of Neurosciences will illustrate that sensation can come from unexpected places:

- Dr Stuart Derbyshire, a Reader in the School of Psychology, is set to explore the illusions and realities of pain
- A volunteer will feel the sensation of stroking move from their own arm, which is being stroked whilst hidden, to a rubber arm that they see being stroked
- This strange experience exemplifies the connection between the brain, the eyes and the senses with the volunteer sensing the stroking coming from the rubber arm even though it is not their own, exemplifying the way in which the human brain can be fooled into thinking that an inanimate object is part of their body