



American College of Neuropsychopharmacology

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Romina Mizrahi to receive the ACNP Joel Elkes Research Award

The American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP) has named Romina Mizrahi, M.D., Ph.D., as the recipient of the 2020 Joel Elkes Research Award. Dr. Mizrahi is Professor and Associate Chair of Research for the McGill Department of Psychiatry in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. She was previously Professor at the University of Toronto and attending psychiatrist at the Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

Dr. Romina Mizrahi obtained her M.D. degree from the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1998, and her Ph.D. in 2007 from the University of Toronto. Dr. Mizrahi seeks to understand early molecular changes in the brain of youth with psychosis and addictions with the hope to identify novel molecular targets for prevention, intervention and treatment. Dr. Mizrahi's hopes to advance our understanding of how the brain functions *in-vivo*, in particular to identify molecular targets implicated in stress and drug use in youth.

Dr. Mizrahi's uses molecular imaging techniques such as Positron Emission Tomography (PET) to study the pathophysiology of schizophrenia, the clinical high risk (CHR) for psychosis and addiction, in particular cannabis use. Dr. Mizrahi's major contributions involve first *in-vivo* human studies evaluating dopamine response to stress in CHR, first episode psychosis (FEP) and cannabis users. Dr. Mizrahi has demonstrated that people who are at high risk for psychotic illness experience an inordinately large release of the chemical dopamine when stressed. This level of dopamine release is slightly lower than that of people with schizophrenia, but higher than that of people without any symptoms. Dr. Mizrahi's research points to a way to potentially prevent the development of schizophrenia among people at high risk, by modulating their dopamine-stress response.

Dr. Mizrahi's strategic vision in developing an immensely creative research program for *in-vivo* molecular imaging in youth, is exceptional – especially with regard to the use of novel radiotracers to target novel molecules of interest in brain. Dr. Mizrahi performed the *first in-vivo* human and patient PET studies of [¹¹C]-(+)-PHNO, [¹⁸F]-FEPPA, [¹¹C]-CURB, and [¹¹C]-NOP to image dopamine, neuroinflammation, endocannabinoid and nociceptin expression, respectively in psychosis and cannabis use. Dr. Mizrahi's publications (>125) are published in top tier journals like JAMA psychiatry, Brain, Molecular Psychiatry, Biological Psychiatry, NPP, etc. Her unique combination of perseverance and skills, in performing highly-complex imaging studies in largely young and unmedicated psychosis patients, has enabled her and her work to have a remarkable effect on the field.

Dr. Mizrahi supports open interdisciplinary, national and international collaborations to jointly advance science. Dr. Mizrahi's commitment to promote mental health is represented by significant participation in the media (newspapers, interviews, radio, TV, etc), including being a Witness at the Canadian House of Commons standing committee on health related to marijuana use in youth, a research priority worldwide given recent Cannabis legalization across the world.

This award presented at the 59th Virtual Annual Meeting of the ACNP is in recognition of an outstanding clinical contribution to neuropsychopharmacology.

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ACNP, founded in 1961, is a professional organization of more than 1100 leading scientists, including four Nobel Laureates. The mission of ACNP is to further research and education in neuropsychopharmacology and related fields in the following ways: promoting the interaction of a broad range of scientific disciplines of brain and behavior in order to advance the understanding of prevention and treatment of disease of the nervous system including psychiatric, neurological, behavioral and addictive disorders; encouraging scientists to enter research careers in fields related to these disorders and their treatment; and ensuring the dissemination of relevant scientific advances.