Webinar: Scientifically accurate and ethically responsible science communication in psychiatric genetics

Speakers: J9 Austin, Nicholas Clifton, Ziada Ayorech, and Robbee Wedow
Hosts: Helena Davies & Niamh Ryan

The PGC Outreach Committee, BGA Public Science Committee, and IBANGS are delighted to invite you to our webinar, **'Scientifically accurate and ethically responsible science communication in psychiatric genetics'.**

Psychiatric genetics brings together two complex fields - psychiatry and genetics - that, when combined, have an exponential potential for misinterpretation. We are at a turning point in our field; effective communication is more critical now than ever. The challenge ahead is ensuring responsible use and communication of psychiatric genetics that is responsive to the changing landscape, amid increasing hype, commercialisation, and misinformation.

In this webinar, we will cover topics including genetics in the media (J9 Austin), methods to empower scientists to give feedback on psychiatric genomics in the media (Nicholas Clifton), social media as a communication tool (Ziada Ayorech), and misuse of genetic data and how we can combat it (Robbee Wedow). We will conclude with a Q&A.

Sign-up here:
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_WI1rKKyARwGZFOJXvJC11g#/registration

J9 Austin

Discussing Genetics with the Public and the Media

This presentation will focus on how to talk with interested but non-expert people about genetics, especially as it relates to psychiatric conditions. We will talk about the usefulness of analogies for getting points across in an understandable manner, some common misapprehensions and how to address them. We will talk about the concept of risk and how to address it in these contexts. As well, we will briefly discuss how to approach media interviews about genetics, and the importance of media training.

Nicholas Clifton

AuthentiSci: Empowering Scientists to Give Feedback on Psychiatric Genomics in the Media

With the modern digital ecosystem, misinformation about genetics and mental health spreads rapidly, undermining trust, perpetuating stigma, and distorting public understanding of psychiatric research. AuthentiSci is a UK-based non-profit initiative that addresses this challenge by enabling scientists to directly review and clarify how their fields are represented in the media. Through an open-access platform and growing international network of researchers, AuthentiSci connects published science with expert, evidence-based commentary, helping the public see what is accurate, exaggerated, or missing in science reporting. This talk will outline the platform's model, impact, and ongoing collaborations with academic consortia and public engagement initiatives to ensure that the communication of science remains scientifically accurate and ethically responsible. Find out more at www.authentisci.com.

Ziada Ayorech

Social Media as a Communication Tool

In today's digital age, social media stands as a vibrant avenue for sharing insights in psychiatric genetics, yet it remains underexploited by researchers. Scientists continue to prioritize traditional channels, like academic journals, which rarely reach the general public. When we do go on social media, we rely on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Blue Sky which mainly cater to peer interactions. Robust evidence from pilot studies, qualitative research, and randomized trials reveals that effectively communicating the genetic underpinnings of mental health disorders can lead to improved outcomes for patients and their families. Equipped with extensive expertise derived from rigorous doctoral training, numerous presentation slide decks, and comprehensive course materials, researchers possess abundant content ready for dissemination across social media. With access to advanced creator tools that illuminate audience demographics and engagement trends, these platforms provide strategic pathways to dispel misconceptions about genetics and cultivate trust within diverse communities—key steps towards improving the representation of samples in genetic studies. In this interactive talk, we'll explore actionable strategies to craft engaging content for varied audiences, learn how to

integrate social media into hectic academic schedules, and harness the capacity to forge connections with global communities.

Robbee Wedow

How Can We Collectively Work Together to Act against Misinformation / Misuse of Our science?

Recent, but reemergent misuses of genetic data and research remain a critical issue in the scientific and public spheres. While many scientists are concerned about how their own research might be misused by nefarious actors, training or advice about best practices in this area remains sparse. In this talk I will discuss practical actions for scientists interested in preventing and combating the misuse of genetic data and research. I will focus on several prevention strategies, such as changing genetics curriculum, identifying often misused areas of genetic science, clearly communicating findings, preparing a media strategy and interacting with the media, etc. I will also highlight pragmatic strategies for combating misuse like pushing back against misuse in industry or by nefarious actors like white supremacists. I will draw from real examples I have navigated in my own career like the creation of the “How Gay are You?” GenePlaza app or the Buffalo, NY supermarket shooting.