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Boston University School of Medicine News



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Newton resident Nelson Butters, Ph.D., a professor of neurology (neuropsychology) at Boston University School of Medicine, recently was awarded a \$79,186 grant from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism for the first year of a three-year grant to study how chronic alcoholism affects certain cognitive functions.

Long-term chronic alcoholism is a disease marked by distinct memory impairments. The condition is engendered by daily consuming the equivalent of a quart of whiskey or a case of beer over an extended period of time, such as 10 or more years.

Researchers once used Alcoholic Korsakoff's Syndrome, an amnesic condition, as the model for a typical alcoholic illness. The syndrome was thought to occur suddenly as the result of nutritional deficiencies rather than the toxic buildup of alcohol in the bloodstream. Butters' earlier studies have shown that Alcoholic Korsakoff's Syndrome was a gradual consequence of toxic accumulation of alcohol, not simply the result of malnutrition, since well-fed alcoholics developed similar memory disorders as did alcoholics who were malnourished.

Further evidence compiled by Butters indicated that both young and old alcoholics suffered memory lapses associated with alcohol abuse. His

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research also has demonstrated that an alcoholic patient will recover certain aspects of memory, such as perception and concept formation, if he abstains from drinking for three to five years. Finally, Butters will examine whether memory disorders generated by alcoholism differ from senile dementia such as Alzheimer's disease or other amnesic illnesses.

A 1960 graduate of Boston University, Butters received his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Clark University in Worcester, Mass. He was the recipient of a Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship and a National Institute of Health Pre- and Post-doctoral Research Fellowship. President-Elect of Division 40 of the American Psychological Association, Butters is a member of the Collegium of Distinguished Alumni of Boston University's College of Liberal Arts and he is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Butters recently has collaborated on a book entitled Alcoholic Korsakoff's Syndrome: An Information Processing Approach to Amnesia, which analyzes memory, perceptual and sensory disorders associated with the disease. The author or co-author of 154 scientific articles, he is a Research Career Scientist at the Boston Veterans Administration Medical Center in Jamaica Plain, Mass. He joined the BUSM faculty in 1967.

Butters, his wife, and their three children reside on Upland Ave.

Boston University School of Medicine is the site of several major interdisciplinary research centers, including the Hubert H. Humphrey Cancer Research Center and the Cardiovascular Institute of Boston University. The School is an innovator in medical education, offering several alternative curricula leading to the M.D. degree.