



Press Release – For Immediate Release

15<sup>th</sup> May 2019

## **THE ROBIN TAVISTOCK AWARD 2019**

### **THE ROTTERDAM APHASIA THERAPY STUDY Group**

The Trustees are delighted to announce that the **Rotterdam Aphasia Therapy Study Group**, fondly known as **RATS**, is the recipient of The Robin Tavistock Award 2019. This is the 1<sup>st</sup> time, since its inception, that the Award has been made in Europe.

This Award is named after Robin Tavistock, the 14th Duke of Bedford who founded The Tavistock Trust for Aphasia. It is presented annually to a person, or group, who is inspirational and has made a significant contribution to the field of aphasia.

RATS is unique – a collaborative, multi-disciplinary group of people, who have produced, over many years a body of work that has had a significant influence and made a difference to the lives of people with aphasia. The RATS group is made up of clinical linguists, speech and language therapists, neurologists, epidemiologists, neuropsychologists and other medical disciplines. *Please see list below.*

The roots of the group go as far back as the 1970s, when the respected neurologist Dr. van Harskamp set up the Rotterdam Aphasia Foundation at the Erasmus University Medical Centre. Dr. Evy Visch-Brink was the first to be invited to be part of this new project, and not long afterwards Dr. Mieke van de Sandt-Koenderman came on board. In 1996, Mieke moved to Rijndam Rehabilitation Centre, whilst Evy continued her research and clinical work at Erasmus MC – but the collaboration continued and blossomed.

There have been 3 RATS trials: **RATS 1**, 58 participants, was published in 2004 – examined whether semantic therapy would have more effect on communicative functioning than phonological therapy. **RATS 2**, 80 participants, was published in 2011 – it explored cognitive-linguistic treatment versus communication-orientated treatment. **RATS 3**, 152 participants, was published in 2017 – investigated cognitive linguistic intensive treatment in the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 weeks of treatment versus no treatment.

Running parallel to this work both Evy at Erasmus MC and Mieke at Rijndam, have overseen exceptional work that has involved some of the same group of people [along with others] and which continue to have a positive impact on the aphasia world. The focus of RATS, and of their clinical practice and research has been, mostly, functional outcomes, always putting the person with aphasia at the heart of all that they do.

It is very difficult to encapsulate in a brief summary what is so special about the work that has emerged from the RATS group. The collaboration has been exceptional: Evy and Mieke were responsible for creating and honing the research questions; P. Koudstaal and D. Dippel together with F. van Harskamp ensured the integration of the investigations within a medical research model. The group has produced prestigious work of the highest standards, respected world-wide. Both Evy and Mieke, in particular, are recognised for the quality of their work over decades, for encouraging invaluable collaboration and for their warmth and energy.

The RATS group is an embodiment of what can be achieved when multidisciplinary collaboration and mutual support is central to research and clinical practice.

**The RATS group:** EG Visch-Brink, clinical linguist; WME van de Sandt-Koenderman, clinical linguist; PJ Koudstaal, neurologist (RATS 1, 2 & 3); DWJ Dippel, neurologist (RATS 1,2 & 3); F van Harskamp, neurologist (RATS 1); LML de Lau, neurologist (RATS 3); H Lingsma, epidemiologist (RATS 3); M Smits, radiologist. **PhDs:** SJC Doesborgh, psychologist; M de Jong-Hagelstein, SLT & neuropsychologist; F Nouwens, SLT & clinical linguist, H el Hachioui, neuropsychologist; C Mendez Orellana, neuroscientist.



## Additional information:

- **Aphasia** is a complex communication difficulty that is sometimes known as dysphasia. It can be caused by a stroke or by brain damage caused by a tumour, a car accident, a blow to the brain or by a progressive neurological illness – anything that damages the ‘communication centre’ in the brain.
- People with aphasia can find it hard to speak, read, write, understand language and use numbers – or a combination of any of these. However, intelligence is not affected.
- Aphasia is different for each person.

## The Rotterdam Aphasia Therapy Study group

RATS 1: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/14657447>

RATS 2: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20935327>

RATS 3: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23343197>

### Some further aphasia projects at Erasmus University Medical Centre – Dr Evy Visch-Brink

- Development of 2 treatment programmes: BOX (semantic treatment) and FIKS (phonological treatment)
- SPEAK studies: 1 year follow up from stroke, language & non-linguistic cognitive functioning, recovery and prognosis (PhD H el Hachioui, psychologist)
- Development of the ScreeLing, a linguistic screening test for aphasia (Visch-Brink, van de Sandt-Koenderman, el Hachioui).
- Translation of the CAT into Dutch
- AWAKE surgery protocol (D Satoer, clinical linguist).

As well as many other projects, e.g. PPA (primary progressive aphasia); Collaboration of Aphasia Trialists (CATS)

### Some further aphasia projects at Rijndam Rehabilitation Centre – Dr. Mieke van de Sandt Koenderman, in collaboration with Dr. G M Ribbers

- PACT – Partner of Aphasia patients Conversational Training (SM Wielart, SLT aphasia team).
- Development of the Scenario Test, a test for verbal *and nonverbal* communication (AC van der Meulen, clinical linguist aphasia team).
- Treatment trials: Melodic Intonation Therapy in the [1] subacute and [2] chronic stage after stroke (AC van der Meulen, clinical linguist aphasia team)
- Treatment trials: transcranial Direct Current Stimulation (tDCS) in the subacute stage (PhD K Spielmann, neuropsychologist)
- Augmentative & Alternative Communication (Touch Speak; Gesturing: K van Nispen)

*For further information, please contact:* [e.visch-brink@erasmusmc.nl](mailto:e.visch-brink@erasmusmc.nl) or [msandt@rijndam.nl](mailto:msandt@rijndam.nl)

*A formal presentation will be made later this year. TBC.*

## The Tavistock Trust for Aphasia

- The Tavistock Trust for Aphasia is the only grant-making trust in Europe that focuses solely on aphasia. The Tavistock Trust for Aphasia works to improve the quality of life for those with aphasia, their families and carers.
- We do this by, amongst other things, funding pioneering research and projects, as well as raise the profile and understanding of aphasia nationally and internationally.
- Robin Tavistock, later the 14<sup>th</sup> Duke of Bedford, had a brain haemorrhage in 1988 which left him with aphasia (communication disability). Robin founded the Trust to ensure that more people could have access to the quality of treatment he received.

*For further information, please visit the Trust's website:* <http://www.aphasiatavistocktrust.org>