

Sun News Alberta

Meds keep schizophrenia at bay

By **MICHELLE MARK**, EDMONTON SUN

If it wasn't for his schizophrenia medication, Austin Mardon says he'd be "eating garbage on 97 Street - if I wasn't dead."

The PhD and Antarctic explorer was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1992 at the age of 30. Now he's participating in a clinical trial that makes it even easier for schizophrenics to stay on their meds ... and out of hospitals and jails.

Dr. Pierre Chue, associate professor at the University of Alberta hospital, said there are an estimated 30,000 Albertans currently suffering with schizophrenia, with about one third living right here in Edmonton.

"It certainly speaks to the fact that schizophrenia is more common than people think," he said.

A new Canadian report called the Economic Burden of Schizophrenia in Canada in 2004: Current Medical Research and Opinion shows the national cost of treating the disease in 2004 reached \$1.2 billion.

Chue said a large part of that comes from the hospitalization - with schizophrenia patients in Alberta spending a combined 180,000 days in hospital in 2002 - of people not taking their medication and relapsing in their psychosis.

"It's critical that they take all their medication, but the most common symptom of schizophrenia is the belief that nothing is wrong with them at all," Chue said.

He also said there are new drugs available that will help with that problem, but aren't yet approved.

One of those drugs is Respiradol, which Mardon is taking on a trial basis. It reportedly can be injected every two weeks rather than being taken every day, reducing the chances of sufferers going off their medication.

"I have been cursed with schizophrenia, but I have been blessed with the insight to co-operate with my doctors no matter how difficult it is," said Mardon, a volunteer with the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Champions Centre and the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta.