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Stroke and SIDS in Alaska topics of neuroscience conference

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University of Alaska Fairbanks neuroscientists studying stroke and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome presented their research findings at the 7th Conference of the Specialised Neuroscience Research Programs in New York 19-22 August 2008.

The scientists are part of the Alaska Basic Neuroscience Program at the UAF Institute of Arctic Biology, which is a National Institutes of Health supported SNRP whose goal is to expand and stimulate basic neuroscience research at UAF with a focus on neuroprotection and adaptation. The ABNP is an integral part of UAF's initiative addressing health disparities of Native Alaskans and Arctic populations.

'SIDS is the leading cause of post-neonatal infant mortality in North America, occurs at twice the national average rate in Alaska and three times that rate in Alaska Natives,' said Michael Harris, an ABNP neuroscientist. 'The work that I do tests a leading theory which suggests that infants are made vulnerable to SIDS, in part, through brainstem abnormalities.'

'Cardiac arrest and stroke are the leading causes of adult disability and Alaska's arctic ground squirrel may lead to improved therapies for patients,' said Kelly Drew, ABNP neuroscientist and IAB associate director.

Drew's presentation addresses how arctic ground squirrels protect their brains during cardiac arrest using biochemical signalling pathways. 'Understanding these pathways will be a first step toward developing new drugs to mimic the squirrels' ability to avoid brain damage in humans,' Drew said.

'This conference creates a platform for young investigators - both faculty and students - from small research universities to network and collaborate with other scientists and to show their skills to National Institutes of Health officials,' said Lawrence Duffy, director of the ABNP and interim dean of the UAF Graduate School.

IAB neuroscientist Barbara Taylor, and neuroscience Ph.D. candidates Andrea Corcoran and Cord Brundage will also be participating in the conference. The ABNP is supported by a SNRP grant through the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, National Institute of Mental Health and the National Centre for Research Resources.

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