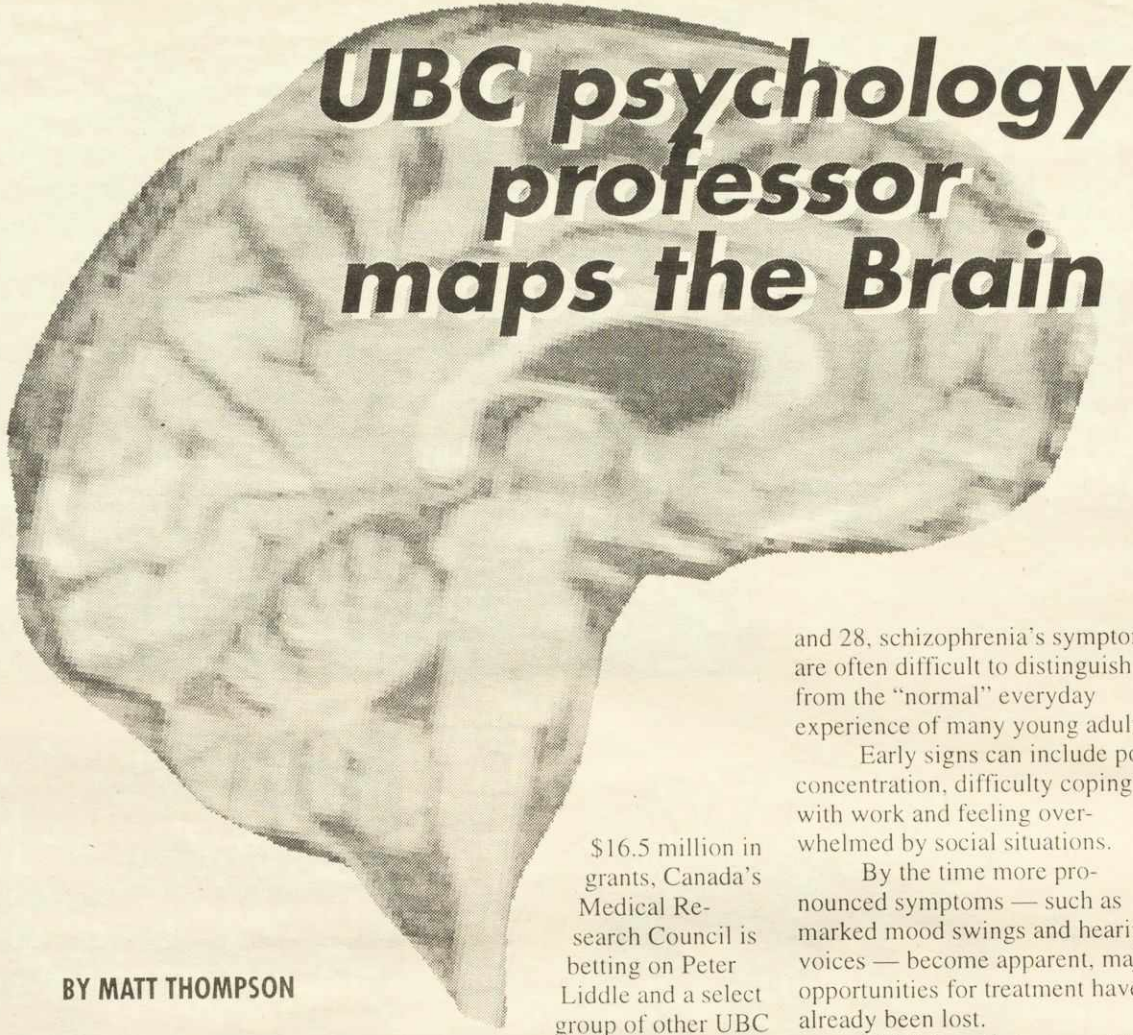


## SCIENCE &amp; ENVIRONMENT



## UBC psychology professor maps the Brain

BY MATT THOMPSON

VANCOUVER — Right now, precise quantities of blood are racing through your head.

Reading, like any activity involving the brain, causes nerve cells to activate and subtly increase their supply of blood.

Using Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), University of British Columbia psychiatry professor Peter Liddle is able to produce pictures that show these infinitesimal changes in blood flow as brain "patterns."

Liddle's research indicates that for people affected by mental illnesses like schizophrenia, these patterns are comparatively abnormal.

And while he thinks he can develop a better way to diagnose and potentially treat the disease, to find out he is going to need money.

A lot of money — which he will get.

By providing UBC with

\$16.5 million in grants, Canada's Medical Research Council is betting on Peter Liddle and a select group of other UBC medical researchers to make the next

medical breakthrough.

The money will provide equipment and operating support for studies over the next five years ranging from heart disease to juvenile asthma to cancer.

That is good news for Liddle, whose research relies on a high-tech MRI scanner that is extremely expensive to operate.

"Without the grant funding, we simply couldn't do the work," the UBC professor said.

The results of Liddle's work have been encouraging so far.

By studying the correlation between abnormal brain patterns and schizophrenia, Liddle may be laying the groundwork for physically diagnosing a disease whose early symptoms are often vague and misreported.

Although it affects roughly 300,000 Canadians, most of whom are between the ages of 18

and 28, schizophrenia's symptoms are often difficult to distinguish from the "normal" everyday experience of many young adults.

Early signs can include poor concentration, difficulty coping with work and feeling overwhelmed by social situations.

By the time more pronounced symptoms — such as marked mood swings and hearing voices — become apparent, major opportunities for treatment have already been lost.

Liddle's technique could dramatically shorten the length of time between diagnosis and treatment.

"There's a lot of evidence that suggests that by intervening earlier, we can help people make a good recovery," said Liddle.

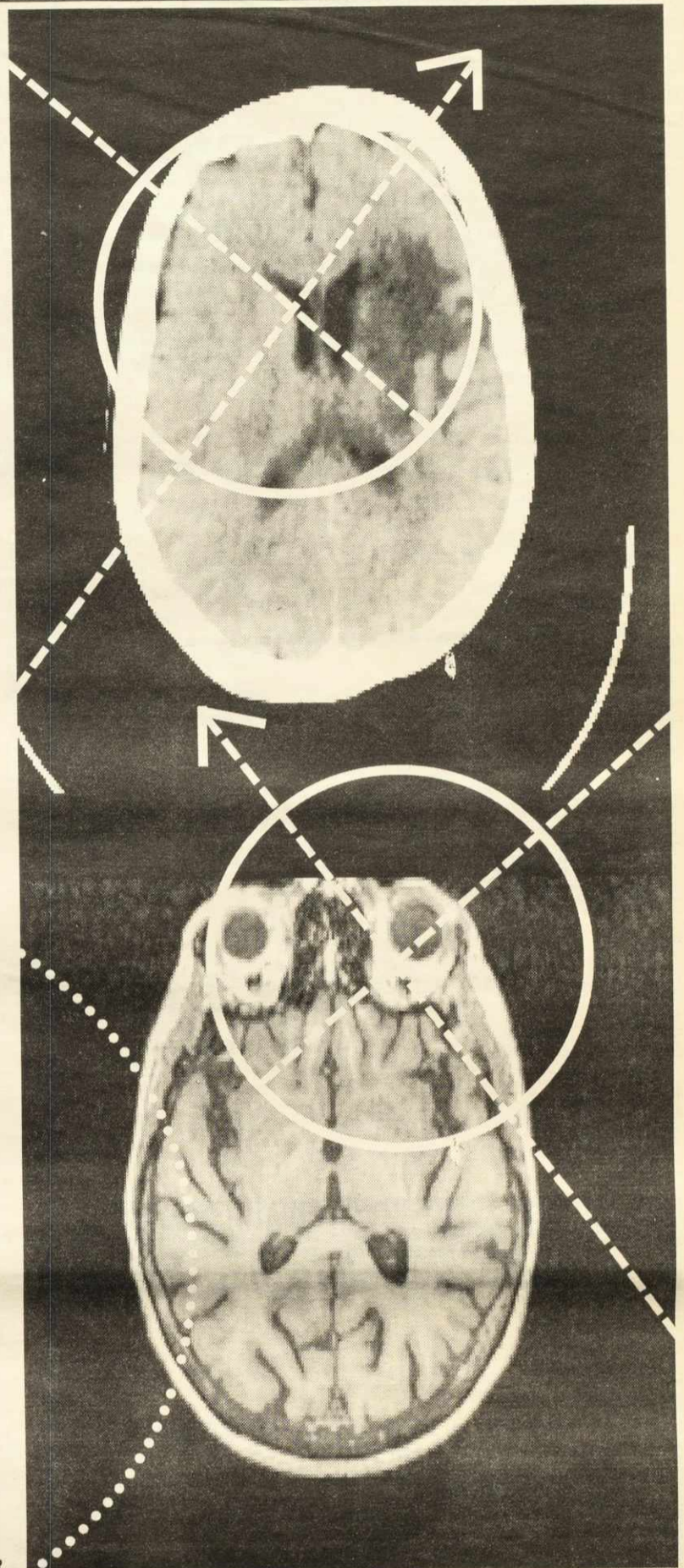
UBC is one of a handful of centers worldwide using similar techniques to understand how brain activity relates to mental illness, but Liddle is confident his research is unique.

"Nobody's doing it quite the way we're doing it," he said. "I hope what we're doing is going to turn out to be the most profitable way."

Like other medical research conducted at the university, Liddle's research could prove very profitable.

Given schizophrenia's place as one of the world's major

*continued on page 8*



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