

WA Centre for Health & Ageing Research News

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"Fantastic, inspiring and life changing" are just some of the words that the Dementia Champions used to describe their experience in participating in the DIRECT study dementia education. The Dementia in Residential Care Training (DIRECT) study education has encouraged research volunteers to champion the dementia cause. After completing the DIRECT education program residential care facility staff are using their newly acquired knowledge and techniques in the workplace. The DIRECT education program hopes to improve the level of caring for people with dementia who live in residential care facilities. This program represents a significant milestone in the development of improving the quality in dementia care education. Study researchers hope that this person-centred education will be a driver for improvement in dementia care and empower residential care staff. Too often the work of residential care facility staff goes unappreciated. They are the unsung heroes of our society. They receive little thanks for the marvellous work they do.



DIRECT Educator Rachel Lowry

The DIRECT education program emphasizes good communication skills and regular interaction when caring for people with dementia. This person-centred education program aims to improve the person with dementia's care experience and thereby hopefully enhance their quality of life.

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New study explores link between cognitive exercise and Alzheimer's

Researchers who specialize in memory loss are seeking people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and a family member or a friend who care for them to participate in ground breaking research.

The Promoting Healthy Ageing with Cognitive Exercise – Alzheimer's Disease study (PACE-AD) is investigating whether a program of mental activity, specifically designed for people with mild dementia, can

reduce or slow further memory decline and improve quality of life. It will also investigate the benefits of this type of program on the family member or friend.

The study is seeking people who are willing to participate in group sessions, once a week, for six weeks. Assessments of thinking abilities and well being will be undertaken.

If you are interested in participating in this research please contact Cheryl on 9224 2855.

From the Director's pen

With the end of the year fast approaching, now is as good a time as any to reflect on our accomplishments over the past year; on our new discoveries; research awards and on the dedication of our research staff in delivering a better and brighter future to older adults.

Our researchers are asking the difficult questions and finding answers to these complex conundrums about the ageing process. By strengthening our understanding of the intricate mechanisms behind the ageing process, we are able to develop interventions that identify risk factors and explore ways we can prevent, delay and cure diseases normally associated with ageing. We are passionate about changing the lives of the aged by applying our research findings to provide real, world class solutions to benefit the health and well-being of this community. These achievements are only made possible through a collaborative effort with our partners, supporters and research volunteers. Over the years half a million Australians have generously given us their time and commitment to assist us

in delivering, to you, a healthier future. I would like to take this opportunity to express a special thanks to everyone who has been, and continues to be involved in research – You've done a wonderful thing – thank you!

I would also like to acknowledge and thank our Executive board – Chairman Dr Penny Flett, Prof Peter Klinken, Ms Gail Milner and Dr Mike McCall who have been outstanding in providing our Centre with direction, focus, leadership and strength in these turbulent financial times. In 2009 WACHA has gone from strength to strength.

We welcome Natalie Daniel, Kim McGaffin, Varsha Hirani, Dr Derrick Lopez, Mark Pindan, Cullimurra Woia and Michael Wiebrands to the WACHA family. Season's Greetings to all. We look forward to sharing our important discoveries with you in 2010.



Leon Flicker, Director



Award recognises high impact change agent

Dr Kate Smith has been instrumental in improving the lives and health of older Indigenous Australians who live in remote areas of Australia. Dr Smith's journal article was voted the best high impact article of the year by the Medical Research Foundation. Her article detailed her groundbreaking work on the fact that older Indigenous adults were 5 times more likely to have dementia than non-Indigenous Australians. The article has generated a lot of interest with experts around the world contacting Dr Smith for advice. Dr Smith's role has been pivotal in bringing about a positive change to remote communities. She has worked tirelessly to include all stakeholders in sharing her vision and has pulled the necessary resources to bring about a dramatic improvement to the lives and health of older Indigenous adults. Congratulations to everyone involved!



Front Left to right: Dr Kate Smith with Medical Research Foundation Research Director Peter Leedman, Chairman Professor Lawrie Beilin AO and Manager Mr Doug King and other research finalists

Dr Kate Smith is also to be congratulated for her highly commended award in the Westscheme/ COTA Champion for Seniors award. Her outstanding commitment to research has brought about a positive change for Indigenous adults and is inspirational. We are all very proud of Kate!

Lifestyle changes prevent dementia

There is no way of completely protecting yourself against Alzheimer's but you can change your lifestyle to keep your brain and your memory in shape. Recent scientific evidence has shown that if you stop smoking, keep physically and socially active, and eat well you can lower your risk of developing dementia.

"What's interesting is that these lifestyle changes, such as physical activity, don't just have benefits for memory and preventing Alzheimer's disease, they can also ward off other illness, such as heart disease and assist in overall wellbeing," says Professor Flicker.

"This is big news for people who have memory concerns. These lifestyle changes are not expensive and do not involve pharmaceutical treatment. I would encourage everyone to incorporate these lifestyle changes into their lives – today!" continues Professor Flicker.

The Australian population is ageing rapidly and although dementia is not a normal part of ageing, dementia is on the rise. So it is crucial that we continue to build on this evidence to find ways to prevent and delay dementia.

Getting your facts right: Dementia vs Alzheimer's

Dementia is an umbrella term which describes a serious deterioration in mental functions such as memory, language, orientation and judgement.

Alzheimer's disease is one cause of dementia, but several other diseases can cause it too. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia, accounting for around two thirds of cases in older adults. Alzheimer's disease is not a natural part of ageing.

Visit from television royalty delights researchers



Noeline Brown, Prof Leon Flicker and WACHA researchers

The Centre's researchers were treated to a visit from Australia's television royalty and Australia's inaugural Ambassador for Ageing Ms Noeline Brown. Ms Brown is one of Australia's best loved actresses, a well respected media personality, an active community member and a wonderful role model. She is a fantastic example of healthy and active ageing and delighted our researchers. Staff from the Centre shared their latest research findings and were only too happy to pose for a photo with Noeline. Noeline was very interested in the work being conducted at WACHA and hopes to visit again soon. "It is important that people realise that ageing people are still useful and have a great deal to contribute to society," Ms Brown said.

John's story: Taking the first step

Like you and I, John, a research volunteer, has personal goals. On face value John is a pretty ordinary bloke, sixty five years old and gainfully employed. John, however, has been feeling trapped and has not been able to move forward because of depression. Sadly, he has been feeling like this for over 30 years.

"I have been feeling bad about myself for many years and have lost interest in the things that used to interest me. I realized something was wrong, but I couldn't put my finger on it" says John. "These symptoms cost me a beautiful relationship, as I was not a very nice person to live with".

"Being involved in research has changed my outlook on life- this took me completely by surprise! I feel in charge of my own destiny again and I am even contemplating further studies, rather than spending my declining years on the couch watching game shows. I realize that I still have a long way to go, but being involved in this research study has helped me put my foot on the first step of the ladder upwards."

Depression in older adults often goes unrecognized and untreated, resulting in untold misery. Reducing depression has the potential to have a profound impact on the lives of people with depression and their friends and family and to the cost of health care. It is for these reasons that WACHA has made depression a research priority.

More research will allow us to better understand depression as well as the risk factors which in turn will lead to improved treatment and management methods to help people like John have a better quality of life.

Researchers at WACHA are looking for volunteers like John who have depression to join a study designed to improve response to normal antidepressant treatment. Call 9224 42855 for further information.

Celebrating research triumphs and the opening of new research space



September saw the official opening of our new research space in Ainslie House at Royal Perth Hospital. Researchers, collaborators, volunteers and our supporters toasted the opening of our new research space. Over a decade ago the Centre began as a collaboration between the academic units of Geriatric Medicine and Geriatric Psychiatry at The University of Western Australia. Since then the centre has grown into what you can see today – a vibrant, successful and driven group of multi disciplinary researchers that have chosen to make researching health and ageing their lifelong passion.

Our success led to a need for new research space. We would like to thank the Medical Research Foundation for their financial contribution towards this new research laboratory.



Listen to the experts

We recently welcomed international health opinion leader Professor Paul Dieppe to Royal Perth Hospital to deliver a lecture on the context placebo effect.

Perth's medical professionals were shocked by the mountain of evidence presented by international health opinion leader, Professor Dieppe, in support of the existence of the context placebo effect.

Scientists are trained to be skeptical, to think through a problem carefully and consider all the options and possible explanations.

Professor Dieppe's lecture was recorded and is available on the WACHA website. We would like to thank the ANZSGM for making Professor Dieppe's visit possible by co-sponsoring this event.

Local news reader lends WACHA a hand

WACHA has a new promotional video, thanks to the assistance of local Perthonality Craig Smart and The University of Western Australia's Masters of Science communication student Andrew Mills. Craig's on-camera experience proved invaluable. The short three-minute video gives viewers details about the essence of our Centre's work. To view the video go to www.wacha.org.au



Craig Smart

Make someone's day and donate today!

Our researchers are finding ways to extend healthy life, helping to advance effective disease prevention for everyone. The results of their work touch many lives every day. If you can help our Centre to help make a vast improvement in more people's lives donate today. To find out more about the Centre's research advances visit www.wacha.org.au

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