

January 19, 2009

Media Statement

STUDY TO SHATTER FRAILITY

A team of West Australian researchers has been awarded more than \$410,000 to find out how frailty in older age can be prevented or even reversed.

The funding, provided by the MBF Foundation, will enable scientists at the Western Australian Centre for Health and Ageing (WACHA) to analyse the lifestyles of more than 12,000 WA men looking for clues on how mental and physical lifestyle factors may sustain healthy ageing.

Study leader, WACHA Director of Research and University of Western Australia (UWA) Professor Osvaldo Almeida said this arm of the Health In Men Study (HIMS) was aimed at determining how lifestyle, medical and psychosocial factors interact to boost longevity and freedom from disability.

“It’s still not entirely clear why we become frailer as we age - but the reduction of certain stressors in our lives may help prevent illness and disability as we get older, so we’re hoping to identify those specific risk factors that may cause us to become frail and ill,” he said.

“The aim of our study is to have direct effect on health promotion and policy, and lead to the creation of public information about how people can modify or improve their lives for healthy ageing.”

The largest study of its type in Australia, HIMS began in 1996 gathering information from 12,204 West Australian men aged between 65 and 83 years.

The first phase saw participants undertake an initial detailed clinical assessment, and in 2001 to 2004 phase two involved a follow-up assessment.

This final phase, which has been funded with the help of the MBF Foundation, commenced in August and will use information gathered from the first two phases of the study as well as *The Linked Database Project* – a database containing records of all WA hospital admissions, births, registered cancers, deaths and public sector mental health services since 1980.

Chair of the MBF Foundation Steering Committee and Chief Medical Officer for Bupa Australia* Dr Christine Bennett said the findings would help increase understanding of what people do, or can do, to live healthier, longer lives.

“Australian research has suggested that a third of the health burden relates to behaviours and lifestyle such as smoking, excessive drinking, nutrition and exercise,” Dr Bennett said.

“This study is more specifically looking at how our health changes as we age and what are the factors that influence healthy ageing.

-MORE-

“While our population is living longer, it is important that we do everything we can to make those extra years of longevity healthier.

“Not only will this help to improve people’s quality of life as they age, but healthier populations require less health treatment, making our health care system more sustainable in the long term.”

Professor Almeida said although the study was limited to men, most of the findings were likely to be equally relevant to women.

“The initial clinical assessments were conducted on men, but because women are equally prone to the risk factors which contribute to frailty, we believe the results of the study will also be applicable to women,” he said.

About the MBF Foundation

The MBF Foundation is a charitable institution set up by MBF to support and manage important health initiatives for the community using a portion of MBF Group’s investment income each year. Projects undertaken encompass three key areas – wellness and obesity, supporting healthy ageing and keeping healthcare affordable.

<http://www.mbf.com.au/AboutMBF/TheMBFFoundation>

*Bupa Australia cares for its customers under the brands MBF, HBA, Mutual Community and ClearView.

-ENDS-

MEDIA CONTACTS:

**Sarah Hayward, WAIMR Media Consultant
m 0411 404 415, or (08) 9388 9280**

**Arriarne Kemp-Bishop
Corporate Communications
Bupa Australia
m 0414 311 331**