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Hunter Ageing Research seminars

February 10th : Grant submission theme

With NH&MRC and ARC application dates looming, this months HAR Seminar featured ongoing work being developed for submission.

Dr Lynne Parkinson (Senior Research Fellow at CREA) presented a study on "**Nursing home**



residents' needs: measurement and meaning," developed in collaboration with Julie Byles, Kichu Nair, Isabel Higgins, Jon Adams and David Sibbritt. Lynne explained that at present there are no strong tools available which can directly assess the needs of residents of nursing homes across a range of domains.

Lynne stated that there are several reasons why assessment of aged care resident needs is important. Firstly, Commonwealth government reforms and the introduction of new legislation (*Commonwealth Aged*

Care Act, 1997) provide an impetus for a coordinated assessment of the needs of aged care facility residents; second, evidence suggests that the quality of care of residents can be significantly increased when consumer needs are assessed as part of routine care, and third the expectation that meeting the needs of residents could enhance the viability of "ageing in place" by identifying and dealing with issues before they become a problem within the location of choice. Ageing in place enables providers to deliver continuity of appropriate care within a familiar environment – often without the need for relocation - and was one of the specified objectives of the changes to the Australian aged care system which came about with the introduction of the *Commonwealth Aged Care Act, 1997*.

This study will test an open access tool, available in several modes (self-administered, staff administered and PDA administered), in the field for reliability, validity, feasibility and utility. The tool being tested has the potential to meet the mandate for two central issues within recent government aged care policy reform by enabling measurement of specific individual need, and enhancing the possibilities for ageing in place. Both these issues impact upon the potential for ageing well and ageing productively in the last years of life. The study involves three main phases:

- The first phase, already completed, used qualitative research to develop domains and language for the tool;
- The second phase, pre-testing of the draft tool, and visual aids to comprehension, is in progress; and
- The third phase will involve field testing of the tool, including test-retest and staff acceptability surveys.

Questions for Lynne to consider included the issue of non-verbal communication and how this could be augmented. Also, whether the assessment could be administered by specially trained volunteers who are already present in the nursing homes and would

Hunter Ageing Research and the Centre for Research and Education in Ageing are member groups of the Newcastle Institute of Public Health and the Hunter Medical Research Institute.

For more information about HAR:

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www.niph.org.au
and www.library.newcastle.edu.au/faculty/med/HIAR.html



mean staff needn't be taken away from their usual activities.

Professor Julie Byles presented "**Nutritional screening among older hospital inpatients**". This project (conducted Sandra Capra, Lynne Parkinson, David Sibbritt and Kichu Nair) aims to assess the effectiveness of multi-disciplinary systematic nutrition screening and intervention for people aged 65 years and over admitted to acute hospitals, that are at high risk of being under-nourished, and therefore at increased risk of developing adverse health outcomes in association with these findings. Proposed for introduction into the John Hunter Hospital, Newcastle, patients found to be at-risk when screened will be assessed further using the Dietitian administered Subjective Global Assessment, with anthropometric measures and biochemical markers being used as corroborative evidence of poor nutrition. Those found to be under-nourished would be offered best practice in the form of multi-disciplinary intervention provided by a team of Dietitians, Social Workers, Clinical Nurse Consultants, Geriatricians, Oral Health Professionals, Speech Pathologists, Physiotherapists, Pharmacists and Social Workers.

Julie explained that the risk of under-nutrition among older people can be increased by a number of factors: change of diet due to illness, reduced appetite due to loss of sense of taste, medications, constipation, depression and decreased activity and mobility. Further, work undertaken by the research team indicates that 11% of people aged 65 years+ were severely malnourished at the time of hospital admission and a further 37% were mildly or moderately malnourished. Investigators are confident that findings from this study will provide a much needed basis for targeting nutritional assessment and services in a growing population of older people, as well as having a major impact on enhancing recovery and quality of life, reducing complications, length of stay and readmission.

Funding News

RM Gibson Scientific Research Fund

There is a call for applications for the RM Gibson Scientific Research Fund for members of the AAG for medical research. Up to \$15,000 is available for the award of up to three grants. Application forms are available from the web-site: www.aag.asn.au or by e-mailing: aag.secre@flinders.edu.au

Evaluation of the Department of Veterans' Affairs "Cooking for 1 or 2" cookery class program

Congratulations to Julie Byles, Lynne Parkinson, Clare Collins and Lynette Mackenzie for their recent grant of \$40,000 to evaluate a program of self-help cookery classes developed by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The programs are being conducted at various

locations on the NSW north coast (i.e. Forster, Kempsey, Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour) and involves a self-complete questionnaire posted to cookery class participants prior to their first lesson, in conjunction with anthropometric measurements taken by a Research Dietitian in a home visit. Data on nutrition awareness, eating habits, social support and general abilities with daily living activities will be collected at baseline, at the end of the cookery course and 6-months later via questionnaire. The Dietitian will visit with participants at baseline and at the 6-month follow up.

Folic acid study

CREA's submission to Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), to assess the scientific evidence of benefits and risks of an increase in folic acid intake in Australia and New Zealand, has been accepted and granted \$7000. CREA will undertake a report that describes the current teaching and practice of vitamin B12 deficiency in Australia and NZ, the prevalence of those at risk of B12 deficiency, and assess the available evidence for improvement in haematological sequelae of B12 deficiency associated with up to 1.0mg/day folic acid.

CREA Research Themes

Recognition of Team Leaders

In December 2004, a number of local researchers accepted positions of Team Leaders, taking on a "management" role of different CREA research theme areas.

Champions for the "*Health and Health Care*" theme are:

Kim Wylie – Dementia
John Ward – Chronic Diseases/Symptoms
Pat Michie – Mental Health
Pauline Chiarelli – Incontinence
Lynette Mackenzie – Falls
Sandra Capra – Malnutrition
Kichu Nair – Preventive Services/Medications
Isabel Higgins – Health Services

Champions for the "*Community and Environment*" theme are:

Lynne Parkinson – End of life decision making
Penny Warner-Smith – Ageing workers
Jenny Stewart-Williams – Socio-economic factors and ageing
Lynette Mackenzie – Home hazards
Felicity Barr – Social support and interaction
Carol Penning – Community Care
Viv Allanson – Residential Care
John Burgess – Aged care workforce

Champion for the "*Healthy Ageing*" theme is:

Lynne Parkinson – Physical activity, nutrition, social activity, productive activity, occupation and leisure.

CREA Team Leaders will be a representative for a particular research theme and provide a crucial point of contact regarding activities relating to that theme. The role of Leader is not meant to become a burden in any way, but it is important and can be best guided by these three main principles:

- 1) Act as a reference person for your area of research activity, who could provide the first advice to fellow researchers as to how best to approach a particular tender/grant/project etc, and who best to include. You may also choose to lead any initiative that comes from such opportunity;
- 2) Remain alert for opportunities for CREA to contribute to research projects, and other activities and opportunities to fund these activities; and
- 3) To help build our networks of interested people, who can collaborate and help build strengths in research and education in ageing



L-R: Meredith Tavener, Felicity Barr, John Ward, Viv Allanson, Julie Byles, Lynette Mackenzie, Lynne Parkinson, John Burgess, Jenny Stewart-Williams, Fiona McEwan.

Hunter Regional Research Database

*Adapted with the permission of
Associate Professor Allyson Holbrook, Director,
Centre for the Study of Research Training and Impact*

Over the last year the University of Newcastle's Centre for the Study of Research Training and Impact has been developing the HIT Hunter Regional Research Database. This is to be a database of the research from all sources that has been published about the Hunter region over the last decade. It is a unique development; there doesn't seem to be such a database in any other region.

The problem being addressed is that millions of dollars are spent on research in regions annually by a wide variety of groups and government agencies. Information is at a premium but is hard to use effectively. Published research findings can be inaccessible, difficult to read and even more difficult to amalgamate meaningfully. For people

who are not researchers, the technical or academic nature of the reporting of research findings can be difficult to penetrate, judge and link to other research. Data on regions embedded in reports of larger scale research can be difficult to extract and compare.

The HIT Hunter Regional Research Database aims to make published research information on the Hunter region available to the community in order to advance personal, social, commercial, industrial and regional development. The Database will store, list, categorise and summarise all published research information about the region over the last decade and continue the collection into the future. It will link with other databases of regional statistical data; have links to resource web addresses and an archive of hardcopy material. There will be an internet gateway for public access, subscriber services and a fee-for-service capability for complex data requests.

For more information, please contact Allyson Holbrook at the University of Newcastle.

Upcoming Conferences, Meetings, General Interest

Australian Association of Gerontology

38th National Conference of the AAG, 9-11th November 2005. The theme of the conference is "Exploring the meaning of ageing through research, policy and practice". Location for the conference is the Gold Coast International Hotel, Surfers Paradise, QLD. Keynote speakers include, Professor Jon Pynoos from the Andrus Gerontology Center, University of Southern California, who has interests in housing for older adults, including ageing in place and Dr Norman Swan, the multi-award winning medical journalist. For more information, e-mail: aag.conf@flinders.edu.au or keep checking the web-site: <http://www.aag.asn.au>

Report on an ageing Australia

The Australian Government Productivity Commission just released (12 April 2005) their completed research report on *the "Economic Implications of an Ageing Australia"*. The Australian Government asked the Productivity Commission to undertake the study to examine the productivity, labour



supply and fiscal implications of likely demographic trends over the next 40 years, to further improve understanding of the challenges and opportunities resulting from an ageing Australia. For more information, phone the media and publications section on (03) 96532244. The report can be ordered on-line

for \$18.00 plus GST, or sections down-loaded in pdf or RTF format.

The Australian Centre on Ageing

Presents the 4th Emerging Researchers in Ageing (ERA) conference to be held on 8th November 2005, at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, South Bank, Brisbane, QLD. The theme will be "The diversity of ageing: pooling the evidence". Abstracts are due by the 8th July, and registration will be available on-line from May onwards. For more information, visit

www.uq.edu.au/aca

Mental Health Rights

The Mental Health Coordinating Council has released a new edition of the legal guide to the NSW Mental Health System. The manual can be down-loaded from the MHCC web-site:

<http://webmail.fhs.usyd.edu.au:8100/Redirect/www.mhcc.org.au>

Alzheimer's Australia

The 2005 Alzheimer's Australia National Conference is being held from the 11-13th May this year, at the Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour. Held bi-annually, this year's conference entitled "Living with Dementia: Positive Solutions" will cover themes of health and wellbeing, quality dementia care, and human rights and dementia. For more information, visit the web-site:

<http://www.alzheimersconference2005.com/>

CREA Research Team Meeting

Scheduled for Thursday 12 May 2005, to be held in room 220, David Maddison Building, from 3.00-5.00pm. Agenda to be sent closer to the meeting date.

Up-coming HAR Seminar Dates

The next Hunter Ageing Research meeting is scheduled for 9th June, from 4-5pm, at the Case Study Theatre, David Maddison Building, Cnr King & Watt Streets, Newcastle. The meeting theme is "Retirement".

XIXth World Congress of Gerontology

July 5-10, 2009. To be held in Paris, France "Longevity and healthy ageing: A world challenge – innovative approaches."

The French Society of Gerontology and Geriatrics (FSGG) is proud to host the XIXth World Congress in Paris July, 2009. Paris is not only an attractive city, it is also one of the most accessible, best situated and most convenient locations in the world suitable to organise efficiently a large international congress in its new conference centre.

<http://www.paris2009.org/>

TALIS 2005 Conference: 'Tracing Our Roots - Broadening Our Vision'

TALIS - Third Age Learning International Studies - is an informal and accessible international network that focuses on learning and education in the later years of life. Its main objective is to make the accessibility to long life learning easier for older people.

Its 15th seminar entitled 'Tracing Our Roots- Broadening Our Vision' will be held **11th to 13th May**

2005 in Glasgow, Scotland and will be hosted by the University of Strathclyde, Senior Studies Institute. The seminar focuses on sharing the multi-disciplinary and multicultural roots of third age learners. The purpose is to bring older learners together with older adult educators and researchers in order to link social and educational gerontology with interdisciplinary studies.

Australasian Epidemiology Association Conference

This year the Australasian Epidemiology Association (AEA) Annual Conference is going to be held in Newcastle on October 5-7, 2005. The theme of the AEA conference is "Looking Ahead in Epidemiology" and it provides an opportunity to present and discuss current and future epidemiological, biostatistical and public health issues, and to provide a forum for networking with like-minded individuals. The AEA invites you to contribute a paper or poster. Abstracts must be submitted by 5pm on Wednesday June 1st 2005. To submit an abstract please refer to the conference website: www.icms.com.au/aea2005

Remember....

Saturday 14th May is the National Day of Thanksgiving.

End Stage Dementia Care, Management and Palliation

Submitted by Elaine White, Clinical Nurse Consultant, Hunter CARE Network.

This year's R.M. Gibson's Travelling Fellow was the key note speaker in the one day seminar, 24th November, "End Stage Dementia Care, Management and Palliation". The seminar was a joint initiative of AAG's Hunter Chapter, Hunter Health and Central Coast Area Health Services. The seminar was an outstanding success with 205 registrations from across all disciplines of health professionals, some travelling long distances from Narrabri, Tamworth, Port Macquarie, Sydney and Wollongong.

Professor Volicer from Boston University, USA, has established one of the first Dementia Special Care Units in the American Veterans' Administration system and introduced the concept of structured palliative care for patients with advanced progressive dementia. He passionately shared these concepts in his two presentations "Managing Behavioural and Psychological Problems of end stage dementia" and "Palliative Care in Advanced Dementia".

Eight other speakers were very dynamic and very motivating and came, freely giving of their time, to share their knowledge, covering a wide range of "End of Life Care" which was full of information and thought provoking, in an area of care that is not often highlighted.

Helga Merl from the Central Coast set the scene by *“Contextualising Dementia; diagnosis to end stage palliative care”*. Dr. John Ward challenged the audience with *“Ethical issues of late dementia”* followed by Catherine Wallace’s inspiring *“Innovative Approaches to Care”* and Di Ford’s helpful advice to carers, *“Preparing and Supporting family and significant others”*.

The after lunch sessions included Sharon Wall’s, another inspiring self-reflective, *“Non Medical Approach – enhancing quality of life”* and Professor Cliff Hooker’s very questioning presentation, *“Picturing Persons”*. Concluding this special day were Prof. Peter Ravenscroft’s discussion, *“Can the Palliative Service help in end stage dementia”* and Peter Cleasby’s *“End of Life Pathways Perspective”* which will be of great value to all carers in this clinical setting.

Evaluation Feedback was most informative and one of the questions asked was to “List three things learnt by the participants during the seminar”. There were 189 responses to different areas of learning. These comments were themed and ranked from most frequent to least frequent responses, as follows:-

- Non-medical management of end stage dementia (27 comments)
- Person centred care (25 comments)
- Futile medical treatment (using PEG tubes and feeding) (24 comments)
- Palliative Care (20 comments)
- Ethics (12 comments)
- Mixed comments were on:-
 - Stages of Dementia
 - Services and politics
 - Support, education and advocacy
 - Dementia is terminal
 - Pain Control

The seminar certainly included a splendid opportunity, over a great sit down luncheon, to network with fellow colleagues sharing the same interests. There were a lot of requests for on-going seminars on this topic.

The seminar was also well supported by Janssen-Cilag, Norgine Pty. Ltd., Bard Australia and Tyco Healthcare. However the success of the day went to the enthusiasm of the delegates and to the key speakers who inspired all present. This was reflected in quotes extracted from the evaluation feedback, such as:-

“Thank you for a well organised seminar, good food and inspiration to keep going” and “I think that instead of patient centred care, it should be called patient scented care, because it is about caring for the person’s ‘essence’”

SENIORS WEEK 2005

“Ageing and Loving It” community forum

Co-written with Rainbow Visions Hunter.

CREA, in collaboration with Rainbow Visions Hunter, hosted a one-day free community forum as part of Seniors Week 2005 celebrations. The forum entitled “Ageing and Loving It” aimed to create a fun and interactive environment, to facilitate learning about good nutrition, keeping your body active, the importance of sexual well-being in older age, travel and how older men and women can continue to get their message about loving life communicated to others. Bryce Gaudry, MP for Newcastle, welcomed participants to the forum, then it was straight into a talk by the Older Women’s Network (OWN) and video of their travelling theatre group. Their material ranged from sharp political comment to the woes of modern communications where you can grow old just hanging onto the phone waiting for a real human being to finally answer your call!



Catherine Roe tells us about eating healthy for life.

Next, the audience enjoyed a pictorial journey through Europe, Britain and Canada while Pauline Baker from Jetset Travel Newcastle explained the

ins-and-outs of travelling, with handy hints for “grey nomads” to help stay safe and confident, while having a good time. Catherine Roe, Public Health Nutritionist for Hunter Population Health gave an informative talk about the best food for (all) ages. Then Laraine Dunn had everyone up and on their feet, sometimes one foot at a time to demonstrate the importance of good balance. Participants were encouraged to use everyday tasks as opportunities to exercise, such as hanging out clothes.

After lunch, Professor Victor Minichiello (pictured right), from the School of Health at the University of New England, NSW, spoke to the audience about sexual well-being in the older person. That’s right, sexuality in all forms does not necessarily stop when a person



reaches 30 or 40! Interestingly, Victor talked about the rate of sexually transmitted diseases amongst older people, which was surprisingly high. Pauline Chiarelli held a session on "Sexercises". Definitely the most fun you can have with your clothes on! Many men and women neglect their pelvic floor muscles, which are vital for both continence control and sexual enjoyment. Again, everyone was on their feet to squeeze, squeeze, squeeze - six sets of six squeezes a day can keep your nether regions trim, taut and terrific.



Laraine Dunn makes sure we move it, before we lose it!

The day came to a close with three panel discussions focussing on people's individual experiences of growing older and advocacy issues: giving an interesting insight into ageing in different cultures, ageing in the workforce, coping with retirement and women's perspective versus blokes' views.

Overall, it was a great day, with thanks to Julie Byles, Ivan Skaines from Rainbow Visions, Jennifer Thurgate and colleagues at DADHC, Bob Kucera and Thushara Dibley from CCEB, and Fiona McEwan from NIPH.

Older people are sexual beings also

Special Guest Speaker from the Seniors Week Forum - Professor Victor Minichiello, School of Health, University of New England, NSW

Is it out-of-fashion to think that older people are asexual and do not enjoy sexual intimacy in their relationship? Why even ask this question? Gerontologists have documented many negative beliefs about older people. One of these is the myth of the 'asexual' older person. Cultural misunderstandings about the sexuality of older people are grounded in general negative attitudes towards older people; the view that older people are offended by sex, that sexual interest and activity is inappropriate in older people, that older people are unable to enjoy or have sex, that sex is a health risk, and that older people are physically unattractive and sexually undesirable. It is not difficult to find advertisements or media stories that reflect and

reinforce these views, although things are changing and there is a growing awareness that such views are ageist. A major Australian newspaper reported on its front page the results of a survey that found older Australians are sexually active with the following caption: 'Sex and the aged: survey surprise!'

Perhaps the editor of this newspaper was surprised to learn that older people are sexual beings, but this is no great news to many older persons. Nor is this a new finding. Empirical research into the sexual lives of older people, including our own research conducted at the University of New England (see Minichiello et al 2005), reveal that men and women over the age of 60 are still sexually active and physically capable of engaging and enjoying sexual intimacy in their relationships.

There are biomedical and psychological issues to consider. For example, the medical literature shows that illnesses and surgery can have a significant impact on sexual function of older persons, and can lead in some cases to sexual dysfunction. And some medication can also adversely affect sexual performance. The top-rated drug categories administered to patients over 65 years of age are commonly associated with a frequent rate of erection complications, in most cases sexual problems are resolved after discontinuation of the medication.

It is clear that older people are not asexual. It is important for practitioners to discuss sexual health needs with their older clients, rather than ignore them or accept stereotypes that suggest that these needs are either not important or do not exist. Comments such as 'but you are 70', 'you should not worry about such things', 'condoms or an HIV test are not required for you' are not helpful to older persons as they demonstrate presumptions, if not ageist attitudes. And older people should feel comfortable that they are sexual beings, regardless of their age, and enjoy their sexual wellness.

Reference: Minichiello V., Coulson, I. (eds) 2005, Contemporary Issues in Gerontology: Promoting Positive Ageing, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

Let us share your news

- Have you received an award or grant?
- Have you reached an important milestone in a project?
- Do you have something you'd like to share that might help others working or researching in ageing?
- Is there an event you'd like people to know about?

Let us know at meredith.tavener@newcastle.edu.au

And we can either include in the HAR newsletter or send around a special e-mail to let HAR members know.

Did you know.....

That free telephone counselling is available for male patients of GPs?

The RACGP web-site contains details of "Mensline Australia", a national service that provides telephone counselling, information and referral for men with family and relationship concerns. The service promotes an approach specifically tailored to men, with a focus on improving personal relationships, developing crisis management skills and reducing levels of self-harm and violence. "Mensline Australia" is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the cost of a local call on 1300-789-978.



The Centre has just completed a major national research project into mature age employment funded by the Commonwealth Government and National Seniors, *Mature Age Employment: From Redundancy to Reconstruction*.

The "New" Nursing Home

Adapted from the New York Times, april 23, 2005

The Green House Project, comprising 10 new suburban houses in Tupelo, Mississippi USA, is an experiment in reinventing the nursing home. Its creators hope it will herald a new age for old age, although its advantages to residents are yet unproved in health care studies.

Green Houses are part of a broadening movement to humanise care for elderly people with smaller, more domestic settings and a closer sense of community among residents and staff members. And they are an effort to address the



fears of being institutionalised, among them anxieties about the loss of independence and the potential for abuse.

Nursing care professionals, specialists on

aging and advocates for the elderly call such experiments a culture change in the industry. People 85 and older are the fastest-growing segment of the population and will continue to be so over the next 30 years, the Census Bureau predicts. More than a humane experiment, the Green Houses claim to be economically viable – also bragging the less-than-10% staff turnover in an industry that has a national average of 80-90%! And to help them feel that the Green House is their home, residents are encouraged to help with cooking or house-keeping, in addition to companion animals and plants to tend.

"Eldertopia" perhaps? No-one disputes the fact that old age is old age, but perhaps small moments of humanity are had more often in such a setting.

National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre



The National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre, at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, undertakes research and related activities into the needs of seniors in retirement, focusing on ageing and the productivity of seniors in the community.

The Centre aims to assist Australian seniors in achieving the lifestyle benefits of productive ageing. The Centre focus is on building ongoing participation pathways for the major community involvement avenues of work, recreation, education, community service and facilitating the pursuit of personal quests in an engaging society.