

Hunter Ageing Research

Working with the Australian Association of Gerontology (Hunter Chapter), Newcastle Institute of Public Health and the Research Centre for Gender, Health and Ageing

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Hunter Ageing Research: From strength to strength

Hunter Ageing Research (HAR) moves into a new era of continuing growth and strength this month as its new Director takes up the reigns with eagerness and vigour. As we move on, I'd like to take a brief chance to look back at how far we've come over the past six years.

In the beginning ...

HAR was established in 1999, the International Year of Older Persons. The inspiration came from Professor Kichu Nair in discussions with the Vice Chancellor of the University, Professor Roger Holmes. The idea was conceived in recognition of the breadth and depth of research into issues of ageing and aged care currently undertaken by research groups and service organisations in the Hunter.

The aim was to coordinate the efforts of key stakeholders to enable sharing of expertise and resources to improve the overall capacity for funding and conduct of research into ageing.

Kichu's inspiration was quickly followed by action when he and Dick Heller gathered a handful of us together for a meeting. We promptly developed a mission statement and appointed a Chair, Kichu, and a Director, yours truly.

One of our first activities was to engage in a Delphi process to identify and prioritise some key issues for research in Ageing. By the end of this process we had not only established our top ten priorities, but we had also swelled our membership to almost 100 people. Membership of HAR is now very diverse and includes medical, nursing and allied health clinicians, academics, private sector providers and key informants and consumers.

To celebrate this momentum, we staged a Saturday forum at the Newcastle City Hall. The forum was attended by around 70 people and provided an opportunity for interchange between Hunter researchers and the community. Researchers provided brief presentations of various themes and then the forum debated and reaffirmed our research priorities.

To take our consultation further, we later undertook a community survey where over 600 people in the community gave us their ratings of the importance of different conditions and needs for research for older people.

And, looking back, we haven't fared too badly in making progress on these priorities.

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.

Hunter Ageing Research appreciates the sponsorship of AAG (Hunter) in funding production of this newsletter

For more information about HAR:

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Nutrition scored two places on our list of top ten, so we rallied the Nutrition Working Party. This group has since undertaken two studies of nutrition among hospital inpatients, and two randomised controlled trials of nutritional supplementation. A randomised controlled trial of nutrition screening and intervention is about to be piloted.

Urban design and social participation was another priority, and while this research has taken longer to bear fruit, we have developed some very sound research in this area and we have engaged a large and strong transdisciplinary group to start these studies.

We have also started an intensive program of research on the prevention and management of incontinence with two large studies being funded to research these questions.

A later priority setting exercise identified needs for research in residential care, and two major studies are currently underway. Isabel Higgins is leading a team of researchers who are piloting two different pathways for pain assessment and management among people in dementia care units. And John Ward has led the development of a very large study of best practice for prevention of falls in residential care.



L-R: Dr Lynne Parkinson and Professor Julie Byles

Our seminars provide a fantastic opportunity for us to come together and to share our progress on these and other studies. In 2001 we were lucky to be offered an entire day to feature our research during the AAG NSW Rural Conference at Morpeth. This was a momentous conference that saw a reinvigoration of the Hunter Chapter of the AAG, and the start of a tradition in which the Hunter Chapter of the AAG hosts the rural conference every second year. We also held our

first Heritage Oration which is designed to celebrate the work of influential persons in the development of care for older people.

Over the years HAR has developed into a strong network that is achieving its original goals of communication, sharing and strengthening research capacity. The early goal of creating an institution for ageing research has also been realised in the establishment of a strong Centre for research into ageing within the University - thanks to the ongoing success of HAR and the zeal of its membership.

So it is with enormous pleasure, enthusiasm, and optimism that I had over my role as Director of HAR to Dr Lynne Parkinson. I know that Lynne has already put in place some innovations to keep the energy flowing across the HAR Network. With Lynne's leadership HAR will definitely go from strength to strength.

Julie Byles
Director
Centre for Research and
Education in Ageing (CREA)

And of course, if you're interested in ageing research.....

The Australian Association of Gerontology

...expanding knowledge on ageing

.....Join the Australian Association of Gerontology now. Special offer – with the subscription year being 1 July to 30 June, new members joining after 1 January receive credit of 50% in their renewal notice in June! Please check the website for more details - www.aag.asn.au

Let us share your news

- Have you received an award or grant, or 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? Or is there an event you would like people to know about?

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Hunter Ageing Research welcomes Professor Tina Koch, who writes about....

THE OLDER PERSON RESEARCH PROGRAM

In July 2005 Professor Tina Koch was appointed Chair in Older Person Care, in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, Faculty of Health, the University of Newcastle. This clinical chair is joint initiative between Hunter New England Health and the University of Newcastle, both in New South Wales, Australia. Professor Tina Koch brings to the position her experience in the establishment and growth of a viable and internationally acclaimed research program. Her focus has been on healthy ageing and several published books draw attention to stories of ageing as expressed by older people (Koch, Power and Kralik 2005). Growth and development of a dynamic research team is part of the plan, and five researchers will be employed, mostly part time, by March 2006. Attraction of higher degree candidates to research with older people is expected to strengthen the program.



SETTING THE RESEARCH AGENDA WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Participatory action research and other collaborative methodologies will be used to facilitate groups (including health service delivery staff) to consider common claims, concerns and issues in health care delivery for older people. A book on participatory action research will be launched in Australia, the UK and USA in May 2006 (Koch & Kralik, 2006). In order to kick start the Older Person research program it is asked 'What are the concerns claims and issues surrounding older person care?'

In the effort to answer this question, Professor Tina Koch interviewed 60 health care professionals and academics in the Hunter New England Health Area (November and December 2005). Further research will be facilitated with 60 participants who are older people from June to December 2006). They will be asked the same questions. Data generated will provide an agenda for negotiating the main research areas. In collaboration with all stakeholders the aim is create partnerships, generate proposals, gain

external funding and further the Older Person Research Program.

Contact details for Professor Koch are as follows:

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References:

1. Koch T, Kralik D. *Participatory Action Research in Healthcare*. Blackwell Science Oxford UK. Publication date May 2006 in UK and Australia, and June 2006 USA.
2. Koch T, Power C, Kralik D. *100 Years Old 24: Australian Centenarians Tell Their Stories, 2005*, Viking/Penguin.

Clinical Nurse Consultant Research and Practice Development Older Person Acute Care (OPAC)

By Dr Isabel Higgins
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That the population of people over the age of 65 years is growing exponentially is a growing concern for health care planners. In Australia, people 65 years of age and older constitute the fastest growing portion of the population (12%) and consume the bulk of government and non government health resources (AIHW 2005), a trend which is expected to continue over the next 30 years. Furthermore, the number of people over 80 years will double in the next 20 years and triple over the next 30 years to over 9% of the population (2.3 million people). Indeed, the fastest growing cohort is the over 85's who are expected to grow by 50% between 2011 and 2020 (Nay, 2004, p. 59).

Present health care data bases show that older people have a higher rate of admission to hospital and tend to stay longer than younger cohorts. For example, the average length of hospital stay for older people is reported as 5.3 days compared to 3.7 days across all age groups (AIHW 2005). Of particular concern is that older patients are at greater risk than young adults for functional decline and co morbidity during hospitalisation. Older patients in the community, acute care and residential aged care have complex health needs that require highly skilled care. They are likely to have more than one diagnosis requiring treatment for chronic illness and disability and present to hospital with an acute

episode of illness. Further, cognitive and sensory impairments and mental health problems pose challenges in communication, health assessment, management and ongoing care. Transfer to a hospital may in itself be traumatic for an older person and contribute to their decline in functional status and lead to subsequent admission to a residential aged care facility (SNMAC, 2001, p. 6).

In other words, for the first time in the history of mankind, there is ageing on a scale never seen before and it is demanding our attention. The exponential growth in the number of older people raises a range of social, economic, political and scientific questions about how best to manage the changing demographics and meet the needs of older people.

As with many acute care service providers, the John Hunter Hospital recognised the care of older people needed to be improved and a new model of care, the Older Persons Model of Care (Peek, 2003) was implemented incorporating, amongst other key positions, the CNC OPAC.

In the acute hospital setting the main issues for older people are cognitive impairment, delirium, immobility, falls, incontinence, pressure ulcers and polypharmacy. Poor understanding about ageing pathology, the negative attitudes of health carers towards older people, and that the care and treatment of older people lacks a coordinated, integrated and consultative approach are major areas of concern for senior managers.

The scope of the CNC OPAC role includes the use of research and practice development as mechanisms to bring about change in the practice of nurses. Practice development "is a continuous process of improvement towards increased effectiveness in patient centred care. This is brought about by helping health care teams to develop their knowledge and skills and to transform the culture and context of care. It is enabled and supported by facilitators committed to systematic, rigorous continuous processes of emancipatory change that reflect the perspectives of service users" (Garbett & McCormack, 2002, p. 88).

The CNC OPAC role is an integral component of the OPMC at the JHH and the newly formed "virtual" Centre for Practice, Opportunity and Development (CPOD). The CPOD's key role is "to lead projects aimed at improving patient outcomes, and to bring about cultural change by building skills and interests in research and practice development amongst clinicians."

To this end, my role involves facilitating critical reflection in and on practice; supporting and guiding nurses in increasing their utilisation of research; developing capacities for research and practice development; and designing and developing

programs of research in the care of older people in acute care.

References:

1. AIHW 2005. *Australia's health 2004*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
2. Nay, R. (2004). *Nursing workforce issues in aged care*. In R. Nay & S. Garratt (Eds.) *Nursing Older people: Innovations and issues* (2nd ed.) pp. 58–73.
3. *Practice guidance: Principles standards and indicators: A resource tool*. Standing Nursing and Midwifery Committee, March 2001.
4. Peek C. 2003 *Proposal for acute care service for older people with multiple medical problems*. Newcastle, NSW: John Hunter Hospital Division of Medicine.
5. McCormack, B., Manley, K., & Garbett, R. (2004). *Practice development in Nursing*. Blackwell Publishing.

Funding News

Seniors Week Funding

Congratulations to CREA and Rainbow Visions Hunter, for being granted \$500 to help organize a one-day community forum as part of Seniors Week 2006. Working with Lake Macquarie Council, the forum will be held at Charlestown Library on 6th April this year (more details are provided in this edition of the newsletter).

Nutrition screening

Julie Byles, Sandra Capra, Lynne Parkinson, David Sibbritt and Kichu Nair were successful in securing \$20,000 for "A randomized controlled trial of nutrition screening and intervention in hospitalized elderly".

Women and arthritis

Double congratulations to Lynne Parkinson, who was awarded two grants to study arthritis in older women: \$11,500 in funding from the HMRI in addition to \$15,000 from the Arthritis Foundation of Australia.

Depression

HMRI recently granted Julie Byles and Deb Loxton recently \$11,000 to study "Adequacy and equity of treatment for depression among older Australian women".

Diabetes in rural areas

Diabetes Australia has provided \$35,000 in funding for Anne Young, Julie Lowe and Julie Byles to study "Health care for women with diabetes living in rural areas: a longitudinal study of access to care and health outcomes."

Information adapted from the NSW Seniors Week website: <http://www.nswseniorsweek.com.au>

Now in its 48th year, Seniors Week celebrates the valuable contribution that seniors make to the community. The week of activities provides a great opportunity for all generations to join together and celebrate. There will be more than 500 events to choose from in metropolitan, regional and rural NSW: step out at one of the many dance events, be adventurous with a new outdoor activity or visit an art gallery or museum in your local area. So, take advantage of the great opportunities on offer for all seniors in NSW, and join in with the 235,000 seniors who attended last year and LIVE LIFE!

NSW Seniors Week is supported by the NSW Government and organised and funded by the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

And speaking of living life...why not attend the one-day community forum being organized by the Centre for Research and Education in Ageing (CREA) and Rainbow Visions Hunter and stir up some...

Recipes for Healthy Ageing

Planned for Thursday 6th April 2006, at the Charlestown Library, the free senior's forum will offer a wide variety of informative and interactive workshops, such as learning to cook for 1 or 2, how to practice responsible alcohol habits, staying flexible and balanced with some fitness hints thrown in, and how to keep your mind active through lifelong learning.

For more information, don't hesitate to contact Meredith Tavener on phone 02-49236322, or Fiona McEwan on phone 02-49236321.

Upcoming Conferences, Meetings, General Interest



Inaugural Conference on Disease-Mongering
April 11th - 13th 2006 Newcastle, Australia

INAUGURAL CONFERENCE ON DISEASE-MONGERING

April 11th to 13th 2006

David Maddison Building, Royal Newcastle Hospital, Pacific Street, Newcastle NSW 2300

Do 43% of women have difficulty with sexual relationships that might benefit from drug treatment? Should half of the men over 50 years be treated for erectile dysfunction? Are many shy people really suffering from 'social anxiety disorder'? Is male pattern baldness a medical condition? Are we being asked to conform to certain ideal notions of appearance and behaviour. Such a suggestion is not new but historically it has usually been linked to Orwellian notions of power and control. Now there is a possibility that such standards will be set in future by the profit-hungry medical products industry. Pharmaceutical companies and equipment manufacturers have provided many important medical treatments and diagnostic tests; but are they now busy turning everyone into patients? When does legitimate promotion of public health become mongering of disease for profit? Are these questions being addressed properly?

David Henry (physician and clinical pharmacologist) and Ray Moynihan (writer and journalist) from the University of Newcastle don't think so. These and many other questions will be addressed at the Inaugural Conference on Disease-mongering. The Conference includes an international line-up of leading thinkers in their fields, including David Healy, Iona Health and Joe Collier (UK), Leone Tiefer, Steve Woloshin and Lisa Schwartz (USA), Joel Lexchin and Barbara Mintzes (Canada) and a number of prominent Australian speakers. A highlight of the meeting will be the launch of a previously unrecognized but surprisingly common condition, Motivational Deficiency Disorder (MoDeD). Professor Leth Argos from the University of Newcastle will present data on the prevalence, social impact and treatment of this exhausting new disorder. Conference web site = www.diseasemongering.org.

For more information contact: David Henry e-mail: david.henry@newcastle.edu.au

National Conference 2006

You are invited to attend the **Uniting Care Australia National Conference 2006**. To be held from the 26th to 28th March 2006, at the Carlton Crest Hotel, Brisbane, the conference offers the opportunity for people from the entire network of service agencies within the Uniting Church to engage with each other around the theme of 'Hope, Belonging, Connection, and The Future'. For more information, visit:

<http://www.ucareqld.com.au/nationalconference2006/Index.html>



The 3rd International Conference on Healthy Ageing & Longevity will be held at the Melbourne Exhibition & Convention Centre, Victoria, from Friday 13th to Sunday 15th October 2006. More information is available at: <http://www.longevity-international.com/>
Abstract Submission deadline - May 31
Notifications sent - June 31
Presenting author registration fees due July 13.



AEA 2006

The Organising Committee for the 15th Annual Meeting of the Australasian Epidemiological Association is pleased to invite your participation in Melbourne in 2006. The program has been planned around the theme of "Opportunities and limits in epidemiological research", and will be held over 18-19 September 2006 at the University of Melbourne. Abstracts will be able to be submitted from March until May, with registration closing in July. For further details and the Conference Brochure visit the conference website:

www.conferences.unimelb.edu.au/aea2006

Diversity in Ageing

**AAG - 2006
National
Conference**



**22 - 24 November 2006
Sydney, Australia**

Announcing the **AAG 2006 National Conference "Diversity in Ageing"**. To be held at the Wesley Conference Centre in Sydney, from 22nd to 24th November 2006. For more information, please contact Jane Howorth or Julia Atkinson on phone: 1300 368 783 or 02 66509800, or by email:

aag@eastcoastconferences.com.au



**National Conference
on Social Participation**

The future, solutions and outcomes

*day activities - transition to work - recreation - adult training and support
community access - post school options - community participation - leisure
lifestyle options - alternatives to employment - community life skills*

National Conference on Social participation

To be held in Sydney, over the 30th and 31st May 2006. Venue is Star City, Darling Harbour. For more information please call 02-62833204, or go to www.acrod.org.au

Human health and nature



Getting close to nature may be good for you, say UK researchers. From contact with animals in the wild, to taking part in conservation projects - even getting your hands dirty in your backyard garden - the message is that health can be restored through contact with nature. The authors note that people who take part in conservation projects report health benefits, which they attribute to "being outdoors and to feeling part of a greater system connecting beyond the individual". Moreover, such projects can help to overcome social isolation, develop new skills as well as provide gentle exercise.

Reference: Burls A, Caan W. Human health and nature conservation. *BMJ* 331; 2005:1221-1222.