



# Ageing Well

## National Ageing Research Institute

www.nari.unimelb.edu.au

September 2009  
Newsletter Issue 51

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Print post approved PP341 403000444

## Launch of Australia's first dementia and exercise study

NARI has started recruiting volunteers for an Australian-first study to assess whether physical activity can improve the memory, concentration and wellbeing of people with Alzheimer's Disease (AD).

The collaborative study, officially launched at NARI in June, also involves the Universities of Melbourne, Western Australia and Queensland. Alzheimer's Australia is also supporting Fitness of the Ageing Brain Study II (known as FABS II).

At the launch, Professor Nicola Lautenschlager, who heads the study, highlighted how her earlier research had shown that regular exercise improved brain function in older people. The hope is that a physical activity program will also benefit people with mild to moderate AD.

"Several medications are available to treat AD but this isn't enough to help families deal with this complex problem. We are pleased to be looking at a non-pharmacological option," says Professor Lautenschlager.

The physical activity program involves a commitment of 150 minutes a week, which is about 20 minutes daily. Walking is the most popular physical activity for older people but the program will be tailored to each person's interests.

Before starting the program, participants will be assessed on aspects like muscle strength, flexibility, balance and memory function.

The launch attracted wide media coverage, including numerous radio and television interviews, and prompted interest from potential study participants. In addition, Alzheimer's Australia set up a 1300 phone line to answer queries about the study.

"We need to recruit about 75 volunteers in Melbourne. If you have a family member, friend or neighbour with AD, please let their family know about our study," says NARI research fellow, Dr Elizabeth Cyarto, who is coordinating this multi-centre project.

### To volunteer for the study

Participants must live at home or in a retirement village, be physically well enough to take part, and have a carer for at least 10 hours weekly to assist them.

### For more details

**Dr Elizabeth Cyarto or Dr Muireann Irish: 8387 2305**

*"FABS II is the start of a new endeavour to find treatments for Alzheimer's Disease, other than medications."*

PROFESSOR DAVID AMES (NARI DIRECTOR)



*"There is an urgent need for research on non-pharmacological treatments for Alzheimer's Disease and one of the most promising strategies is physical activity."*

PROFESSOR NICOLA LAUNTENSCHLAGER (UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE)



*"There are 161 new cases of Alzheimer's Disease diagnosed every day – and these figures are set to double in 20 years."*

LYNETTE MOORE (ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA VIC)



## Supporting Lorna all the way



"I always love caring for Lorna and it's no different now, even though she has dementia and poor vision. It just means that I remember and see for her," says husband Malvin Cooper.

Lorna was diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease in 1999 and could be among the first participants in the FABS II study.

With Malvin's support and encouragement, Lorna has already started exercising – most days they walk to the shops or on a set route around several local streets. "We have been volunteers for NARI for 15 years because we want to help to make a difference to the health of older people," says Malvin.

## Epilepsy, falls and fractures



People taking anti-epileptic medication long-term can have reduced bone density and impaired balance, placing them at a higher risk of having a fracture. Neurologist Dr Sandy Petty identified these findings during her PhD research.

She compared various health traits, like bone density, fracture risk and balance function in 29 sets of twins and siblings, where

at least one twin was taking anti-epileptic drugs. The balance tests were done at NARI with her supervisor Professor Keith Hill. "The comprehensive range of balance tests revealed that those taking the medication swayed more, which means they are more likely to have a fall. However, there was no difference in muscle strength and gait between the two groups," says Dr Petty.

"We don't know what is causing the reduced bone density, whether it is the drugs, epilepsy, lifestyle or a combination of these factors. However, seizure control is first and foremost for managing epilepsy, though patients should also be talking with their GPs about the potential side-effects of their medication and how to improve their bone health."

Dr Petty's other PhD supervisors were Professors John Wark and Terry O'Brien from the University of Melbourne.

## Congratulations

NARI Director, Professor David Ames, is the recipient of the 2009 Distinguished Service to IPA (International Psychogeriatric Association) Award.

The citation for the IPA award to Professor Ames states: "You have contributed a great deal to the field of psychogeriatrics over many years through your work within the IPA. In particular, your passion and commitment to the organisation over the term of your appointment as editor of the Journal have been unparalleled."

## Did you know?

Visit [www.nari.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.nari.unimelb.edu.au) for:

- Tips for healthy ageing and information on specific health issues like arthritis, managing pain, dementia, vision impairment, sleeping well and safe use of medicines.
- Recordings and presentations of NARI seminars and lectures relating to ageing well. Click on 'what's new'.
- NARI's research projects in summary form or in more detail. Check out topics like vascular disease, stroke, falls prevention, medications and health promotion.

## Looking at falls prevention



The development of a falls screening tool, specifically for older people attending a hospital emergency department after a fall, evolved from the PhD research of physiotherapist Dr Melissa Russell.

The screening tool (FROP-Com screen) identifies those at risk of having another fall.

Her randomised control study, involving 700 participants,

assessed the effectiveness of an intervention program to prevent falls after people returned home from the emergency department. Interventions included referral to a falls prevention program in the community and also the participant's GP.

People in the intervention and control groups were initially assessed in their home and they recorded any falls for 12 months.

"Although the falls prevention intervention was not found to be effective, previous research has identified several strategies that can prevent falls, including balance exercises and an occupational therapy home-based assessment," says Dr Russell.

"Several key aspects emerged from the research, including the findings that people were at high risk of having another fall after being discharged from hospital."

Dr Russell's supervisors were Professor Keith Hill, Associate Professor Shyamali Dharmage and Dr Lesley Day.

## More grants for NARI

### COMMUNITY BALANCE PROGRAM

*Could a home-based exercise program that improves balance in older people be used just as effectively in a community health centre?*

A \$145,000 grant from the Department of Veterans' Affairs is funding this NARI project.

### DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

*How much is known about depression and anxiety in older people?*

With funding from *beyondblue* (the national depression initiative), NARI is doing a literature review and survey on the knowledge, diagnosis and treatment of depression in older people.

### POSITIVE AGEING

*NARI and the Council on the Ageing are taking the Positive Ageing program to Vietnamese and Arabic-speaking people.*

Positive Ageing encourages participants to develop a self-management program for preventing chronic diseases within their communities and also a support network for members. The project is funded by the Australian Department of Health and Ageing.

## NARI presents...

### ASSESSMENT AND CARE PLANNING WORKSHOP

- November 16-17
- For home care providers
- Venue: Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre

Contact Dr Jean Tinney: 8387 2601 or [j.tinney@nari.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:j.tinney@nari.unimelb.edu.au)

## Sharing our experience

Like Australia, our Asian neighbours are confronting the challenge of rapid ageing, especially China, where by mid-century one-third of the population will be aged over 60.

It was, therefore, with great enthusiasm that we welcomed 12 Thai specialists (neurologists and psychiatrists) to Melbourne in July, for an intensive three-day course on the assessment and management of dementia – a major age-related health challenge.

The course, jointly presented by NARI and Austin Health, comprised morning lectures and afternoon sessions in local memory clinics, so the visitors would see the newly taught theory promptly in practice.

Associate Professor Michael Woodward from Austin Health and I led the course, and lecturers were drawn from NARI staff and associates, as well as from among colleagues at Austin Health, the Mental Health Research Institute, and Royal Melbourne and St George's Hospitals.



*Dementia course for Thai specialists. The participants are with NARI senior research fellow and course lecturer, Dr Cassandra Szoeka (back row, far left).*

## NARI at world congress

NARI was well represented at the 19th World Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics, with Professor Stephen Gibson being an invited speaker and poster presentations by three researchers. The conference, which attracted about 4000 participants, was in Paris in July.

NARI Deputy Director, Professor Gibson, spoke about the results of a NHMRC-funded project into pain assessment in non-verbal older people.

### Poster presentations

**Dr Briony Dow:** Evaluation of the successful Alzheimer Australia's Memory Lane Cafes

**Dr Jean Tinney:** Enhancing staff-resident communication in residential aged care

**Professor Keith Hill:** A home-based balance-training program to improve the balance of older people with mild balance problems (from research by NARI PhD student Jing Yang)

One aspect that this course highlighted was the quality of expertise available in Melbourne. Other cities may be able to organise an array of speakers of similar calibre but none, I feel, could recruit a better group to instruct our specialist colleagues.

As Australia is fortunate to have experience in the assessment and management of dementia, it will be increasingly important for us to share knowledge and ideas with colleagues from our region to assist them in confronting similar challenges to our own.

**PROFESSOR DAVID AMES, NARI DIRECTOR**

## Thank you

We wish to thank the following NARI supporters for their recent generous donations.

Mr and Mrs PR & MG Annal Ms Val Barrett Dr Douglas Blake  
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## A leader in ageing research

**Your donation will help NARI achieve its vision of healthy ageing**

Australia will have six million people over the age of 65 by the year 2050 and they will comprise 25 per cent of the population.

The issues surrounding ageing are complex. At this time of life, the major health concerns include dementia, falls, stroke prevention and pain management.

NARI is a self-funding research institute and relies on donations and research grants to continue its work.

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*Thank you*

## What a relaxing day!



Free acupuncture, reflexology and massage sessions proved popular at an Expo for staff involved in NARI's pain management program at the Royal Freemasons' Homes.

"The R 'n' R Expo gave a dose of rest and relaxation for nurses and personal carers, who have been participating in NARI's Encouraging Best Practice in Residential Aged Care (EBRAC)

study," says Mark Bradbeer, the project's nurse educator.

Guest speakers gave staff and residents an insight into various options for pain management, including Chinese medicine, a trans-electrical nerve stimulation machine and medications. Staff members who had completed the training program were presented with their certificates.

The \$1.16 million EBRAC pain management project, funded by the Commonwealth Government, involves residential care facilities in Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia.

## Working together

**NARI is pleased to introduce Vision 2020 Australia – a partner organisation that is also working to improve the wellbeing of older people.**

Established in October 2000, Vision 2020 Australia is part of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight, which is a global initiative of the World Health Organisation and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness.

Vision 2020 Australia is the peak body for the eye health and vision care sector, bringing together organisations involved in local and global eye care service delivery, health promotion, education and development, low vision support, vision rehabilitation, eye research, professional assistance and community support. It comprises more than 50 member organisations.

The mission of Vision 2020 Australia is to eliminate avoidable blindness and vision loss by the year 2020, and ensure that blindness and vision impairment are not barriers to participating fully in the community.

It implements the Vision Initiative – an awareness campaign aimed at reducing preventable or treatable blindness – on behalf of the Victorian Government.

## Sorting things out



Fiona Richardson has certainly delved into NARI's past since arriving last September.

She sorted through a container crammed with boxes containing research material from NARI studies over the years and developed an archiving system for the studies that staff can easily access. She has also trained staff on archiving procedures.

"There were times when I was in a cold, dusty room but it was nice to see everything becoming ordered. It's wonderful to have a system that really works," says Fiona.

Fiona brings a diverse background to her role. A registered nurse, she has a Graduate Diploma in Health Promotion and Education, is experienced in clinical trials research and she teaches clinical trial management courses.

For now, Fiona is still busy at NARI, working on administrative projects, like archiving corporate materials and assisting in human resources.

## In London

Drs Briony Dow and Jean Tinney attended the International Association of Homes and Services for the Ageing (IAHSA) Conference, in London, in July.

At a symposium on health and wellness, Dr Dow spoke about the updated Well for Life resource kits that NARI developed with the Dietitians Association of Australia and the Department of Human Services. The updated resources aim to improve emotional as well as nutritional and physical wellbeing of older people living in residential aged care and the community.

Dr Tinney presented a poster highlighting how people in aged care facilities viewed their situation of being old and in care, and the importance of staff-resident communication in assisting residents to maintain a sense of self and wellbeing.

## Feet 'n' fall study needs volunteers

Can podiatry treatment improve balance and prevent falls in people with foot pain?

Volunteers for this study must be aged 65 years or older, and had foot pain during the last month.

**FOR MORE DETAILS: 9479 5258**

\*Professor Keith Hill from NARI and La Trobe University is a supervisor for this project. All assessments and treatments will be done at the Musculoskeletal Research Centre at La Trobe University, Bundoora.