



Ageing Well

National Ageing Research Institute

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Associate Professor Gibson advises top US institute



The international research reputation of NARI Deputy Director, Associate Professor Stephen Gibson, has captured the interest of a prestigious American research institute.

He was one of two international speakers invited to a symposium about pain and ageing, organised by the National Institutes on Ageing (NIA) in Washington, in June.

"It was an honour to be considered to have the knowledge and expertise

to contribute to NIA's research program into the mechanisms and management of pain in older people," he says.

"There is only limited research targeting pain in this age group. Most work focuses on understanding the basic mechanisms of pain and its treatment in younger adults."

Associate Professor Gibson said the impetus for the symposium stemmed from the NIA recognising the unique features of pain in older people and the increasing need to address this problem as the population ages.

He discussed collaborative studies from NARI and the Howard Florey Institute that used functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging to identify the way the brain processed pain in older people, and the differences in how younger and older people responded to and processed pain.

Associate Professor Gibson's visit also set the scene for future international collaborative projects involving NARI, the NIA, Harvard University and the University of Florida. Another concept explored was providing the opportunity for NARI PhD students to do post-doctoral research at NIA's consortium of pain institutes.

Make ageing research a priority

More funding earmarked for research into the specific needs of older people and to train new researchers were among NARI's key recommendations, to successfully tackle the impact of ageing on Australia's health system.

In a submission to the Health and Hospital Reform Commission, Director Professor David Ames highlighted the paucity of funding for research into ageing.

He cited the NHMRC 2002 scoping study on ageing that revealed only 0.6 per cent of project grant funding was awarded for geriatrics and gerontology, at a time when more than 40 per cent of the national healthcare budget was spent on this older age group.

The Health and Hospital Reform Commission, established by the Federal Government in February, is working to develop a long-term health reform plan for Australia.

Also seeking a higher research profile for ageing was NARI Deputy Director, Associate Professor Stephen Gibson. He represented NARI at an executive meeting of the Healthy Ageing Research Network that was promoting ageing as a priority issue in the lead-up to the Federal Government's 2020 Summit in April.

The organisation lobbied the Government for dedicated funding for ageing research and the establishment of national institutes of ageing, comprising existing ageing research institutes and a new centre in Canberra.

Be bright and busy

People who have higher IQ, education, job success or take part in leisure activities have a reduced risk of developing Alzheimer's disease, according to research presented at NARI by Professor Yaakov Stern from Columbia University in New York. This group also showed slower cognitive changes in the normal ageing process.

Dr Stern said the research highlighted the concept of the brain having a cognitive reserve that could possibly be enhanced to help delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease or improve normal ageing.

Professor Yaakov Stern (right) chats with NARI seminar convenor Dr Bruce Barber.



NARI's submission emphasised the need to:

- Invest in research that could be translated into routine clinical practice.
- Create defined career pathways and training for academic doctors and researchers interested in working with older people.
- Recognise the increased prevalence of dementia, improve services and educate aged care workers and health professionals.
- Ensure that increased longevity also equates with a good quality of life for older people.
- Make dementia research a priority – pushing back the average age of onset by five years would save the community \$3 billion.

More women in pain



More women experience chronic pain than men, with its frequency increasing after the age of 50.

High on the pain list are migraines, and neck and shoulder pain. Fibromyalgia is sevenfold more common in women than men and irritable bowel syndrome rates four times higher in women.

In addition, many of these conditions are poorly understood, resulting in women being disadvantaged even more because their concerns are not taken seriously and

little research has been done on the gender differences in pain.

Caulfield Hospital rehabilitation physician Dr Carolyn Arnold, on sabbatical at NARI, was speaking at a NARI seminar to highlight The Global Year Against Pain in Women as designated by the International Association for the Study of Pain.

"Researching the differences in how men and women experience pain and respond to treatment opens the way for discovering new insights into pain mechanisms and developing new treatments.

"The peak age for pain in women is 70–80 years and with the ageing population, pain will become a huge public health issue," says Dr Arnold.

Progressing well

NARI's national, two-year projects in falls prevention and pain management to improve care for people in residential care facilities are progressing well.

Last year, NARI received \$1.22 million to research falls prevention and \$1.16 million for a pain management project under the Encouraging Best Practice in Residential Aged Care (EBRAC) program funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

An EBRAC presentation day in Melbourne in July enabled the NARI research teams and key residential care staff from the various states to discuss their particular project and hear progress reports of the five funded projects.

Falls Prevention Project

The nine residential care facilities in Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania are considering their approach to falls prevention, identifying gaps in their practice, and working on an action plan to ensure best practice.

The researchers in each state have completed a detailed report of the existing falls prevention activities in each aged care facility. This includes a summary of recent falls incidents, an environmental audit, and a survey of staff attitudes to safety and reporting incidents. These reports will be discussed with staff to help them identify improvements.



The NARI falls prevention team. From left, Betty Haralambous, Sue Hunt, Professor Keith Hill, Marcia Fearn, Dr Elizabeth Cyarto and Kirsten Moore.

Pain Management Project

The Melbourne research team has spoken with aged care residents about their pain and its management, and interviewed staff about their knowledge and approach to administering pain treatment. Staff and resident focus groups will also discuss these issues.

After each facility's audit is completed, a nurse educator experienced in pain management will work individually with all staff, from personal carers to nurses, on appropriate pain management strategies for each resident.

Research has also started at the participating aged care facilities in Queensland and Western Australia.



Pain research nurse Helen Holloway (centre) with staff members Nell (left) and Marie Claire - all from the Royal Freemasons' Homes of Victoria (RFHV).

NARI Deputy Director, Associate Professor Stephen Gibson, spoke at the project's operational launch in May at RFHV. More than 40 people attended the function, including The Hon Michael MacKellar (NARI Board President), Associate Professor Elizabeth Ozanne (Board member), NARI Executive Manager Debra O'Connor and NARI researchers.

Healthy volunteers needed for NARI balance and mobility projects

Plaiwan Suttanon (PhD student) Requires people over 60 years, who do not use a walking aid. **Ph: 8387 2383.**

Karen Evans (Masters student) Requires people over 50 years, who do not use a walking aid. **Ph: 8387 2685 / 0405 948 222.**

Kade Paterson (PhD student) Requires women aged 65-85 years, who have mild balance problems or have had a fall in the past 12 months – and also women without these problems. **Ph: 9953 3552.**

Australians storm Chicago



This column is being written in Chicago, where I am attending the biennial International Conference on Alzheimer's Disease. There has been great interest here in two pieces of research from Australia.

The initial results from the Australian Imaging Biomarkers and Lifestyle (AIBL) CSIRO flagship study of ageing have been outlined in several posters and platform presentations, and are seen as being particularly novel.

We are finding that the 30 per cent of healthy older people, whose brains show evidence of deposits of the amyloid protein associated with Alzheimer's disease (AD) on PiB PET brain scan, score significantly lower on our detailed neuropsychological test battery than people of similar age with no evidence of brain amyloid deposits. This suggests that AD is producing subtle, but measurable, effects on brain function, years before it can be diagnosed clinically.

Professor Nicola Lautenschlager and colleagues from Perth, working with 170 people with memory complaints, not yet severe enough to be diagnosed as AD, found that memory function improved after participating in a modest exercise program.

Half the participants had usual care and half had additional exercise, comprising 110 more minutes of activity that involved 9000 extra steps a week. Memory test scores for the latter group showed slight, but significant, improvement compared to control subjects.

This is the first trial to show a cognitive benefit for exercise in older people with memory complaints.

Professor Lautenschlager, who recently moved to take up my old job as University of Melbourne Professor of Psychiatry of Old Age in Kew, has applied for money to do a similar study involving people with Alzheimer's disease. If the study is funded, NARI will be closely involved.

PROFESSOR DAVID AMES
NARI DIRECTOR

Dementia kit available

The *Dementia Resource Guide*, developed by a team of NARI researchers, was officially launched in June by the Minister for Ageing, Justine Elliot, at Hammond Care's 7th International Dementia Conference in Sydney. The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing funded the project.

This practical guide considers the social, emotional, physical and spiritual needs of people with dementia, and provides information and resources to assist families, carers and staff in aged care facilities, community care and hospitals.

To obtain your copy of the *Dementia Resource Guide*

- Download the guide at: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-dementia-resource-guide.htm>
- Order a hard copy or CD-ROM at: dementia@health.gov.au

Facing the challenge

The challenge of dementia – what has been achieved and what remains to be done?

This is the theme of NARI's biennial seminar in November.

The seminar is sponsored by Australian Unity Health Insurance with support from the Council On The Ageing.

Thank you

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

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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

A passion for research



"It's like coming back to the future," quips principal research fellow Dr Colleen Doyle.

She is recalling how starting at NARI in April meant returning to the same institute where she began her research career in 1984.

The intervening years served to confirm her passion for project evaluation and aged care.

After completing a PhD in psychology, Dr Doyle initially worked as an

academic in service evaluation and later spent five years as a senior research fellow in psychogeriatrics at Monash University. Being a primary carer for her elderly disabled mother for 10 years, while raising her son, gave a personal perspective to her career focus.

Currently, she is also the project manager for a consortium evaluating the effect and benefits of the Australian Government's \$320 million Dementia Health Priority Initiative, comprising research and care for people with dementia. Her other role is as a senior research fellow at the Centre for Health Policy, Programs and Economics at the University of Melbourne.

In 2007, she was awarded an Alzheimer's Australia Research Travelling Scholarship and visited leading gerontology research institutes in America and the UK, to investigate consumer involvement in dementia care research and the community services available.

"People with early dementia have a high profile in a couple of Alzheimer's societies overseas. This shows the community that even if people have dementia, they can still have a say – until now they have been a silent partner."

At NARI, she is developing various projects – evaluating consumer involvement in all Australian ageing research institutes, the portrayal of dementia in the media and the treatment of depression in people with COPD (emphysema).

Stan's starring role

From starring in training films on falls prevention and balance to volunteering for research programs, Stan Johnston's involvement with NARI spans about 10 years. He also likes editing NARI reports for easy reading.

With Australia's ageing population, he admires NARI's science and empathy.

A long-time head of criminology at the University of Melbourne, Stan would like to strengthen UN-Canberra dialogue on the human right to health.

Liz has lots of energy



"I hope to be one of those older people, still cycling in my 90s. I will probably have new knees and hips by then – but that's fine. It's better to wear out than rust out," says exercise gerontologist Dr Elizabeth Cyarto, a keen cyclist and marathon runner. A Canadian research fellow, she brings more than 15 years experience in physical activity for older people to her role at NARI.

Her involvement started by chance. She was working in corporate fitness when she volunteered to lead a fun and fitness program for older people in a nursing home.

"It was rewarding, knowing that I may be improving residents' quality of life and they looked forward to me coming. I realised then that I wanted to work with older people because they need to be active to stay independent and healthy," she says.

She spent six years as the education coordinator at the Canadian Centre for Activity and Ageing, training voluntary fitness leaders for community activity programs.

Her next career move was to the University of Queensland for her PhD in Human Movement Studies. Working with nine facilities for older people, she devised a strength-training program that could be completed individually or in a group setting. She also developed a training DVD for instructors and a booklet detailing the exercises.

Dr Cyarto hopes to extend this concept at NARI by creating a physical activity program for carers. She is also planning to develop a healthy ageing quiz for older people to help them gauge their wellbeing, and a study exploring the benefits of Nintendo *Wii* for aged care residents.



Stan enjoys working with the Public Health team. He is with (from left) Janet Mackenzie, Dr Irene Blackberry, Betty Haralambous and Dr Jean Tinney.