

NARI news

In profile: Kirsten Moore



NARI research fellow Kirsten Moore became aware of the isolation that older people could encounter when she occasionally helped her mother to deliver Meals on Wheels.

Her interest in older people's needs emerged again while completing her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Sociology at Swinburne University. For her Social Science honours thesis, she focused on the care preferences of older people living alone.

After graduating, she took on a challenging role in Home and Community Care services for the City of Glen Eira. She was responsible for preparing the rosters for people requiring home care, personal and respite care, and this also meant dealing with a multitude of consumer concerns.

Her next move was to NARI in 1999. She has worked on numerous projects including reducing rural carers' isolation by tapping them into computer technology, evaluating the linkages program (case management services for older people), assessing early balance problems in veterans, and identifying the number of aged care beds in Australian hospitals for a Ministerial Advisory Council. Her involvement in NARI's research on restraint use in residential care was recently mentioned in a Victorian Government coronial communiqué about procedures in nursing homes.

Kirsten coordinates the Victorian Falls Clinic Coalition which involves organising a twice-yearly seminar for staff working at the state's 15 falls clinics. She also had a major role in revamping NARI's website

"I enjoy looking at different issues and the diversity of working with service providers, older people or government," she says. "Many positive things are happening for older people."

Singapore visitor



Falls clinic nurse Jin Yih Lee, from Singapore's Tan Tock Seng Hospital, enjoyed the opportunity to extend her expertise.

During her seven-week visit to NARI, she gained an interesting insight into the Institute's research programs and the Falls Clinic at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, Royal Park campus.

Sharing our research...

International Stroke Conference

Consultant neurologist Dr Jacques Joubert spoke about the causes of stroke in different ethnic groups at the International Stroke Conference in South Africa, in October.

Dr Joubert, who heads NARI's integrated care project in preventing secondary stroke, convened a satellite meeting on this topic.

A distinguished seminar



Associate Professor Stephen Gibson was invited to speak about pain in older people at the Jocelyn Wale Distinguished Seminar series, at Queensland's James Cook University in Townsville, in September.

His lecture was video broadcast to the university's campuses in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Cairns. The monthly seminar series, hosted by the university's psychology department, features national and international speakers.

Gerontology Conference

Associate Professor Keith Hill discussed a vestibular rehabilitation service at the recent annual conference of the Australian Association of Gerontology, in Sydney.

NARI colleague Dr Briony Dow spoke about her research into the benefits of person-centred care for older people.

Welcome

NARI's Preventive and Public Health Division is delighted to welcome researchers Dr Jean Tinney and Dr Jaya Pinikahana.

For her PhD, Dr Tinney assessed ways of improving communication between staff and residents in residential care. She is exploring a similar concept in a NARI project that involves trialling and evaluating resources to assist health professionals in providing person-centred care.

At NARI, Dr Pinikahana is evaluating changes in Villa Maria's approach to providing community services to clients. He brings to this project, a strong epidemiological research background in mental health and older people.



Dr Jean Tinney



Dr Jaya Pinikahana



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34 – 54 Poplar Road, Parkville Victoria 3052 (Postal address: PO Box 31, Parkville Victoria 3052)
Telephone: 03 8387 2148 Fax: 03 9387 4030 Email: info@nari.unimelb.edu.au

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Professor McLean retires as NARI Director



“During my five years as Director, circumstances required strategic repositioning of the business and the development of national partnership. There was an urgent need to create an affordable business structure and a sustainable collaborative research program. These goals were achieved with the support of existing staff who assumed critical leadership, attitudes and roles.

Restoring NARI's perilous financial balance involved drastically reducing administrative support and shifting the focus of research programs back to building upon existing successes in clinical gerontology and geriatrics.

The recommendations from the Victorian Department of Human Services' strategic review were implemented and a strong business model is now in place to support the Institute's future growth.

My time was divided between Melbourne Health as my substantive employer, who effectively required full-time service, NARI and its urgent needs, and responsibilities as Chairman and then Deputy-chairman of the multidisciplinary RAPP Clinical School of the University of Melbourne. This workload represented an unsustainable burden long-term.

NARI is equipped to go forward under a Director who can commit full-time to the business of the Institute, hopefully for a decade or more.

I wish the Institute, Members, Board and staff every possible future success in their mission and individual research. I have appreciated the opportunity to serve the Institute.”

NARI Director Professor Allan McLean

From the Board President



“On behalf of the NARI Board and staff, I wish to sincerely thank Professor Allan McLean for his strong guidance and leadership during some difficult times.

He joined NARI when it was struggling financially and he has successfully consolidated the Institute's resources and set NARI on a solid foundation upon which to build. Among his many advances, he initiated and developed the Professoriate, which provides valuable expertise and advice.

We wish Allan all the best in whatever future endeavours his wide-ranging interests take him.”

The Hon Michael MacKellar

Governor opens NARI seminar

The Governor of Victoria, Professor David de Kretser, set the scene when he spoke about older men's health in his opening address at NARI's seminar, *Who Cares? Lifestyle and Care in Older Australians*.

Almost 200 people gained an insight into issues, ranging from relationships in residential care to elder abuse and end of life decision-making.



SPEAKERS' PRESENTATIONS

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In-depth dementia training

Associate Professors Stephen Gibson and Keith Hill will develop training programs for allied health professionals and personal care staff working with people with dementia, as part of a \$1.8 million project funded by the Federal Government.

NARI is collaborating with La Trobe University in a four-year project to establish dementia training study centres for doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and personal care workers.

“Medical and health training will focus on diagnosing the various dementias and their most appropriate management. Training programs for personal aged care staff must consider their diverse cultural and educational backgrounds,” says Associate Professor Stephen Gibson, NARI Deputy Director (Clinical Research).

More NARI Grants

Dementia projects ... page 2

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Best wishes for a wonderful Christmas and a happy, healthy New Year



Professor Allan McLean and staff



NARI seminar: a great success



"NARI's biennial seminar, once again, proved to be an outstanding success," says NARI Board President, the Hon Michael MacKellar.

"The speakers were excellent and topics had wide appeal to almost 200 guests.

"A key message was that older people really appreciate the chance to make their own decisions and their carers should encourage them in this way."

Seminar organisers were Mr MacKellar, NARI Deputy Director (Operations and Development), Dr John Barlow, and Board member Sue Hendy, with sponsorship from Australian Unity Health Insurance and Council On The Ageing.

Guests included Dr Graeme Killer (Principal Medical Advisor, Department of Veterans' Affairs), Andrea Coote (Shadow Minister for Ageing and Aged Care), Alison Beckett and Chris Puckey (Department of Human Services, Aged Care), Carol Hage Mary Knight, Jill Linklater and Barbara Simmonds (Department of Health and Ageing) and Joan Heard and Elaine Muir (Association of Independent Retirees).

The seminar also attracted researchers in ageing and aged care, members of community organisations and students.

In his closing address, the Minister for Aged Care, the Hon Gavin Jennings, (pictured above) stressed that education and information about older people's needs were integral for increasing understanding in this age group and society generally.

Broadcaster Lynne Haultain chaired the morning sessions and Professor Rhonda Nay, the afternoon sessions.

Selected seminar topics will be highlighted in future editions of **Ageing Well**.



NARI's seminar highlighted to participants the importance of education and information about older people's needs.

More new dementia projects

Musical grant

Assessing the benefits of music for people with dementia certainly struck the right chord when NARI researcher Dr Bruce Barber received a \$257,000 grant from the JO & JR Wicking Trust.

Co-investigators in this two-year project are geriatrician Dr Dina LoGiudice from the Royal Melbourne Hospital (Royal Park) and Professor David Ames from St George's Hospital in Kew.

"Numerous reports support the use of music therapy for improving memory and other skills. However, hard evidence is very limited," says Dr Barber.

The trial involves 200 people with dementia. Music therapy includes listening to familiar music and making music by singing or using instruments.



Dr Bruce Barber and Dr Dina LoGiudice

Helpful kit for dementia care

Older people with dementia, their carers, and staff in community, hospital and residential care settings will become more informed about dementia care in a kit being created by NARI.

This 12-month project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, as part of a national policy on improving care for people with dementia.

"The project involves assessing the resources available, identifying and overcoming gaps in information, and then trialling the new kit in various health care settings," says Associate Professor Keith Hill, Director of Preventive and Public Health.

NARI researchers Kirsten Moore and Marcia Fearn are also involved with the project. The NARI team is working with an expert advisory group, whose members include Carers Australia and geriatrician Dr Dina LoGiudice.

High NARI profile at conference

Seven researchers from NARI's Preventive and Public Health Division shared their expertise at the 2nd National Falls Prevention Conference in Brisbane, in November.

The Division's Director, Associate Professor Keith Hill, was an invited speaker. He highlighted the need for different approaches in identifying the early signs of falls risk.

OTHER NARI PRESENTATIONS

MARCIA FEARN: haemophilia and balance problems

SUE WILLIAMS: arthritis and balance problems

XIAO JING YANG: falls risk in older Chinese

MELISSA RUSSELL: FROP-Com risk assessment tool

WILLEKE WALSH: risk assessment in acute hospitals

PAULINE GALVIN: adherence to falls prevention recommendations



Avoiding harmful side-effects of medications

When taking multiple medications, be aware that these can interact in the body and result in the common outcomes of hospital admissions from the adverse side-effects and even death.

Warfarin, a blood thinning agent, is a well-known example of a drug with serious side-effects. These are triggered by changes in dose and timing of medications, interactions with other medicines, and changes in diet and liver function. The problem is compounded because many people self-medicate with non-prescription items without advice.

In many instances, the medication dose for older people may need to be varied from standard recommendations. Safety testing and dosage guidelines normally relate to healthy volunteers and younger patients.

Dosage reduction is commonly advocated for older people because of reduced body weight and a significant decrease in kidney and liver function with age.

Commonsense rules for avoiding side-effects of medications

- If you need to be on newer medications, seek specific advice about the clinical trials and recorded side-effects in older age groups.
- Make sure that one doctor takes overall responsibility for regular reviewing all medicines that you are taking.
- Write a list of all medicines, including non-prescription items, that you are taking and show this to your doctor at each visit.
- Have your medications reviewed by a specialist physician with broad medical experience if you are regularly prescribed more than five medicines
- Seek specific advice about the prescribed dose levels if you weigh less than 50kg, have known kidney or liver disease, or are over the age of 70 years.
- Beware of having medicines added to your treatment if they have only recently – within the last five years – been admitted for use in Australia.
- When travelling overseas, be certain to take a sufficient supply of all your medicines to last the whole trip.

Professor Allan McLean
NARI Director

More grants for NARI

\$44,000 for stroke project

NARI is expanding its stroke prevention project with a \$44,000 grant from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund – Eldon and Anne Foote Trust.

"The grant reflects wider community recognition of our best practice management program of Integrated Care to Reduce Secondary Stroke (ICARUSS)," says consultant neurologist, Dr Jacques Joubert, who heads the study.

The program uses a simple model of care, with stroke coordinators maintaining contact with patients and their GP. ICARUSS has attracted national and international interest.



Educated about falls risk

Associate Professor Keith Hill is co-investigator for a large randomised trial on falls prevention in hospitals, headed by his former PhD student Dr Terry Haines.

Funded by a \$400,000 NHMRC grant, the Queensland-based project involves developing and evaluating an education kit for patients to reduce their risk of falls.

"If this new approach proves effective, it is likely to provide a relatively low-cost strategy to reduce falls in this high-risk setting," says Associate Professor Hill.

Dr Haines' world-first study showed that a comprehensive falls prevention program – comprising patient education, an exercise program, wearing hip protectors and a falls-risk alert card – reduced hospital falls by 30 per cent.

NARI needs your help



We are a self-funding research institution committed to healthy ageing.

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