



Ageing Well

National Ageing Research Institute

www.nari.unimelb.edu.au

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Promotion for Professor Stephen Gibson



"I am passionate about the best way to make a difference to older people's lives," says Professor Stephen Gibson, reflecting on his recent academic promotion.

He is particularly concerned about the better management and treatment of pain for those he considers to be most vulnerable – older people in residential care and with dementia.

During his 20-year career at NARI, his team's research into the mechanisms and management of

pain in older people has gained national and international recognition, and earned Professor Gibson an enviable reputation for innovative research. He is NARI's Deputy Director and heads the Institute's Clinical Research Division.

Professor Gibson is the President-elect of the Australian Pain Society and assumes the top role in April next year. He is a member of the European pain and dementia taskforce, an international advisor for the American National Institutes on Aging and he is on a steering committee for the national pain summit reviewing pain services in Australia.

Coming to NARI with a background in psychology and physiology, he questioned the prevailing view at the time of treating pain in older people in a similar way as in young adults.

Over the years, his team's research has shown that older people's pain pathways, experiences and ability to handle pain differ compared to younger adults. More recent research has also focused on identifying pain in people with dementia and ensuring research results are translated into best clinical practice in residential care facilities.

Sharing our research – 12th World Congress on Pain: page 2

Grant for Alzheimer's study



NARI is involved in a \$687,000 NHMRC-funded project investigating whether physical activity can benefit people with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease (AD).

"In the absence of medication for curing AD, more researchers are now focusing on healthy lifestyle factors that may help to protect the brain," says Professor Nicola Lautenschlager, a member of NARI's professoriate.

NARI Director, Professor David Ames, and Professor Keith Hill are involved in the three-year, multi-centre study. The trial will also recruit participants from the WA Centre for Health and Ageing in Perth and the University of Queensland in Brisbane.

The study stems from Professor Lautenschlager's previous research where dementia free, older adults showed improved memory after taking part in a six-month physical activity program that involved mainly walking. The difference was still evident 12 months after the program had finished.

The new study is investigating if the program can be modified and used for patients with AD, and if the brain benefits even when dementia has been diagnosed.

*Early next year, NARI will seek volunteers diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease to participate in the research.

More grants: page 2

Prestigious Fellowship



NARI senior research fellow, Dr Cassandra Szoeka, has been awarded the prestigious AAR Postdoctoral Fellowship in Dementia to continue her work on the Women's Healthy Ageing Project, investigating factors affecting memory in healthy ageing women.

This collaborative NARI research project, funded by Alzheimer's Australia Research, also involves the University of Melbourne and Stanford University.

The study is assessing the relationship between cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk factors, hormones and genes with memory in 326 healthy women. CVD risk factors include high blood pressure, weight, diabetes, heart disease, smoking and cholesterol levels.

"Studying healthy ageing people earlier in their life is important for identifying factors that may assist in preventing dementia and cognitive impairment in later years," says neurologist Dr Szoeka.

*Best wishes for the Festive Season
and the New Year*

PROFESSOR DAVID AMES AND STAFF

More grants

Three grants for pain research

The effectiveness of acupuncture in treating pain is the focus of two new NHMRC-funded studies, valued at almost \$646,000, and involving NARI's Director of Clinical Research, Professor Stephen Gibson.

In collaboration with the School of Health Sciences at RMIT, one study is assessing acupuncture for treating pain in people with tension headaches. The other project is investigating the value of acupuncture in reducing opioid medications in patients with chronic pain. Another investigator on both projects is former NARI PhD student, Dr Zhen Zheng.

From another NHMRC grant of \$393,750, Professor Gibson is collaborating with NARI professorial fellow, Professor David Le Couteur, to identify how morphine and paracetamol are broken down and eliminated by frail older people. Professor Le Couteur is the Director of the Centre for Education and Research on Ageing at the University of Sydney.

Healthy ageing quiz

NARI received \$50,000 from National Seniors to develop a healthy ageing quiz that will be based on the latest research evidence.

Participants' responses to questions will be rated and practical strategies provided on what they need to do to age successfully. "The best time to focus on healthy ageing is at middle age so the quiz, which will be available on hard copy and online, will target people aged 50 and over," says Dr Briony Dow, the Director of Preventive and Public Health.

Elder abuse

A study that aims to identify early the risk of elder abuse in acute and sub-acute health care was awarded \$96,000 from the Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant. The grant funds a PhD student for the project.

The collaborative research team includes NARI Director, Professor David Ames, Associate Professor Lynette Joubert from the University of Melbourne and NARI Board member, Associate Professor Elizabeth Ozanne, from the University of Melbourne.

Sharing our research

12th World Congress on Pain – Glasgow

NARI's Director of Clinical Research, Professor Stephen Gibson, was invited to present workshops on pain and ageing, and also pain and dementia.

Numerous NARI researchers gave poster presentations, including Dr Bruce Barber, Dr Michael Farrell, Pamela Johnson, Dr Carolyn Arnold and Pauline Gardiner.

The International Association for the Study of Pain hosted the six-day congress in August, which attracted more than 6000 experts in pain and pain management from 60 countries.

3rd Australian and New Zealand Falls Prevention Conference – Melbourne

NARI was well represented on the conference organising committee with Professor Keith Hill (chairman), Kirsten Moore (committee member) and Carolyne Jones (administrative support). The two-day conference was in October.

Professor Keith Hill led a pre-conference workshop on falls clinics and Kirsten Moore presented a session on the environmental factors in falls prevention.

Other NARI staff and students involved in presentations included Claudia Meyer, Melissa Russell, Pauline Galvin, Frances Batchelor, Xiao Jing Yang and Willeke Walsh.

A display of NARI's falls prevention research in an exhibition booth, created by Gihan de Mel, attracted a lot of interest.

Focus on education

NARI is expanding its education and training program next year under the direction of newly appointed coordinator Claudia Meyer.

"Our aim is to improve clinical practice and knowledge, and to ensure our research results are widely disseminated to healthcare professionals and researchers," says NARI's Executive Manager, Debra O'Connor.

"There is an increasing demand for formal and informal training in areas like the HACC-assessment framework, pain, dementia, the wellbeing of carers and falls prevention."

Great advice

"Members of the professoriate give their time voluntarily to assist NARI and their advice is certainly valued," says NARI Director, Professor David Ames.

At the professoriate's annual meeting in October, topics discussed included the challenges faced by smaller research institutes, future research directions, collaborative ventures and sources for research funding.

Members of NARI's Professoriate and Executive at the October meeting. At back (from left), Professors Leon Flicker, Stephen Gibson, Robert Williamson, David Ames and Robert Helme. Front (from left), Professor Nicola Lautenschlager, Dr Briony Dow and Professor Edmond Chiu. NARI Executive Manager, Debra O'Connor, also attended. Absent: Professors David Le Couteur and John McCallum



Successful NARI seminar on dementia

NARI hosted its third biennial seminar in November, under the kind sponsorship of Australian Unity, and explored the theme of *The challenge of dementia: what has been achieved and what remains to be done?*

After the opening address by Rohan Mead (Australian Unity CEO), the parliamentary secretary for Health and Ageing, Senator Jan McLucas, provided an insight into the challenges that dementia posed for Australia. Then Professors David Ames and Edmond Chiu spoke about current research on a common form of dementia (Alzheimer's disease – AD) and a less common form (Huntington's disease).

The second session addressed mild cognitive impairment (MCI), a risk state for the development of AD. The new Professor of Psychiatry of Old Age at the University of Melbourne, Nicola Lautenschlager, discussed the nature of MCI and the controversies surrounding its definition. She also highlighted the results of her study in Western Australia that indicated regular, moderate exercise might improve memory function.

The next speaker, Professor Glynda Kinsella, outlined the latest information about using memory training in MCI and described her present study that is determining whether this form of assistance is helpful when administered in a group setting.



TOP LEFT: A successful biennial seminar. NARI Director, Professor David Ames, (left) with NARI Board President, the Hon Michael MacKellar.

TOP RIGHT: The Hon Dr Barry Jones gives the closing address at the seminar.

BOTTOM LEFT: The morning speakers included parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Jan McLucas, and Australian Unity CEO, Rohan Mead.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Melbourne Health geriatrician, Dr Dina LoGiudice, (left) shares her insight about dementia in remote indigenous communities with Professor Martine Hasseler.

The first afternoon session addressed the issue of pain and dementia (presented by Professor Stephen Gibson – NARI's Deputy Director), as well the challenge of dementia in remote indigenous communities (from Dr Dina LoGiudice).

The seminar's final segment featured presentations from Dr Briony Dow and Kirsten Moore on the *Dementia Resource Guide* that NARI developed, and also Anne Unkenstein's engaging proposal about the need for a memory-friendly society. The Hon Dr Barry Jones closed the seminar with a perfectly pitched series of remarks.

[View seminar presentations at www.nari.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.nari.unimelb.edu.au)

PROFESSOR DAVID AMES, NARI DIRECTOR

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

Warm welcome



NARI's new reception area is proving popular with visitors. It is warm, welcoming and convenient since being relocated from the first floor of building 8 to the ground floor. The former laboratory was revamped to create the reception area and also some new offices for Preventive and Public Health staff.

Administrative assistant Jenny Walsh enjoys working in the spacious reception area.

Visiting students

NARI sparked the interest of three Deakin University students keen to work for a small non-profit organisation.

As part of their Masters of Organisational Psychology course, Sarah Arnol, Audrey Wong and Arnela Campara were at NARI from August to November.

Sarah and Audrey were involved in the data analysis and report writing of the Benchmarking Person-centred Care Survey for Preventive and Public Health Division. Arnela worked on OHS program and policy with Executive Manager, Debra O'Connor.



Deakin University students on placement at NARI. From left, Audrey Wong, Arnela Campara and Sarah Arnol.

NARI's Annual Report can be read online at www.nari.unimelb.edu.au
To obtain a printed copy, phone 8387 2305.

Every step counts

"Competition is fierce, but friendly, between the two NARI teams," quips PhD student Frances Batchelor, who heads the NARI Noctambulists competing in Melbourne Health's Step Challenge.

Of course, when research physiotherapist Karen Borschmann, the leader of the NARI Supernovas, decided to do a 50km Upstream charity walk, well Frances just had to join her.

Each team comprises six members, whose pedometers never leave their side, as each participant aims to do a minimum of 10,000 steps daily for one month.

"I've always done a lot of walking, but I am surprised how hard it is to reach 10,000 steps," says Frances.

"Some days are better than others. We walk at lunchtime, do more walking to and from work, and walk to see our colleagues rather than emailing them."

A total of 214 teams are participating in Melbourne Health's Step Challenge that promotes physical activity in the workplace.



Karen Borschmann (left) and Frances Batchelor step out for Melbourne Health's Step Challenge.

Busy on the ABC

NARI Director, Professor David Ames, was a panel member for a dementia forum during 774's *Conversation Hour*, in September. During the program, he shared the latest research and answered listeners' talkback questions.

A fortnight later, Professor Ames appeared on ABC television's *Catalyst* to discuss a unique neuro-imaging technique for detecting Alzheimer's disease.

He hit the airwaves again in October, this time with NARI research fellow, Dr Elizabeth Cyarto, for the launch of Victorian Seniors Week. Professor Ames highlighted the psychological issues related to healthy ageing and Dr Cyarto focused on physical activity for older people.

NARI research fellow, Dr Jean Tinney, spoke about her research on *Perspective* for Radio National. The five-minute segment was titled, *What purpose do I serve? Finding meaning in being old and in care.*

[Hear the above segments at 'What's New' at www.nari.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.nari.unimelb.edu.au)