



# AGEING WELL

*maintaining quality of life*

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## *Living a longer and healthier life part 2: Dehydroepiandrosterone - DHEA*

**In the March issue of Ageing Well, we promised to continue to introduce you to some of the most talked about life-extending discoveries.**

In this issue, we will focus on one of the most crucial anti-ageing hormones, dehydroepiandrosterone, known as DHEA. This is a steroid hormone that is secreted by the adrenal glands and its levels decrease dramatically with age.

There is some evidence to suggest that DHEA may prevent heart disease, enhance sex drive, decrease body fat, boost energy and improve immunity. In a trial conducted at the University of California, men and women given 50 mg of DHEA for three months reported sounder sleep, increased energy, and a greater ability to handle stress. So is this the wonder "anti-ageing" hormone that we have been waiting for?

The concern is that we have no data on the long-term effects of supplementation and therefore DHEA is still classified as a restricted anabolic steroid. To obtain DHEA through the proper channels requires special permission from the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

Other reasons why we should not rush into the use of this hormone is that more recent evidence suggests that as DHEA supplementation raises the level of sex hormones, it might also raise the chances of developing ovarian and prostate cancer.

So until further studies are conducted to reveal the pros and cons of DHEA supplementation, a simpler and more natural way to boost your own body DHEA production is eating chromium-rich foods such as brewer's yeast, broccoli, barley, shrimp, liver, wholegrains and mushrooms.



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### Education

**Assessment and Care Planning:**

**Training Program for Aged and Disability Assessment Staff in HACC Services**

An innovative two-day training program for aged and disability assessment staff in Home and Community Care (HACC) organisations is planned for September this year.

The program builds on a successful course developed and run by NARI Public Health Division staff in 2000. The aim is to provide staff involved in client assessment with information and skills to improve their practice.

The program will cover topics such as the process of assessment; care planning and review; pathways, levels and purposes of assessment; needs assessment including application of standard assessment tools; planning innovative responses to need; monitoring service delivery and information sharing.

For further details (dates, venue, cost etc.) or to register your interest, contact Joan Nankervis or Melissa Lindeman at NARI on (03) 8387 2148.

### A Message from the Interim Director...



Looking forward to the future.

Many of you would have seen by now the advertisement for NARI's new director that was jointly put forward by the National Ageing Research Institute, Melbourne Health and The University of Melbourne which proposes to establish a major academic initiative in Aged Care Services. The successful applicant will be appointed as the Professor/Director of the National Ageing Research

Institute, the Professor/ Director of the Aged Care Program and a Professorial Fellow within the University of Melbourne. This position will build on the strong service development, education and research initiatives already undertaken within Melbourne Health, NARI and the University of Melbourne. This new appointment is also needed to support and maintain a continuous, collaborative and fruitful relationship between NARI, the Department of Medicine at the University of Melbourne, Melbourne Extended Care and Rehabilitation Service, and the State and Commonwealth Governments.

I should reiterate here that all parties concerned have a continuous commitment to support NARI as the leading Australian institute in ageing research, education and health service delivery. I am confident that our new director will be proud to be the leader of NARI and its innovative, motivated and committed staff and students who are working hard to achieve NARI's short and long term goals to help our older adults to age well.

The list of achievements at NARI is growing by the minute. I would like to take this opportunity to mention just a few of these achievements over the second quarter of the year. From NARI's Public Health Division, the team have co-authored a chapter on falls prevention in a book entitled "Ageing at Home: Practical Approaches to Community care". From NARI's Biomedical Division and Development Office and in collaboration with the Centre for Molecular Biology & Medicine, (CMBM), we have launched a new Society, The Australian Society for Cellular & Molecular Gerontology. This new society was launched during a conference held by CMBM and NARI entitled "The ageing process: Molecular, Cellular and Clinical Studies". The Conference launched by Minister Pike, attracted 14 international speakers and was held at Moonee Valley Race Course on 19-22 March 2001.

Members of the Biomedical Division also contributed to the scientific program of the 22nd Annual Scientific Meeting of the Australian Pain Society that was held in Cairns on 9th-12th April. From NARI's Education Division, our business relationship with VicRoads has proven successful and will continue with another series of Safe Drive Medical seminars in 2001/02. These seminars are directed towards General Practitioners and other health professionals to assist them with issues related to older drivers. I am also very proud to announce that NARI is achieving financial accountability thanks to the hard work of all NARI staff and students. We should all be proud of NARI and its achievements.

Associate Professor Zeinab Khalil  
Interim Director



By Dr Kim Taubman, NARI's Director of Clinical Trials

I was disturbed while viewing "Lateline" on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> February, to observe the

segment on Clinical Trials. Sweeping statements were made claiming patients were being used as "guinea pigs", patients weren't being properly informed of the risks or what to expect, doctors getting kickbacks and being paid amounts of \$6000 for each patient recruited and that patients with intellectual or cognitive difficulties were being exploited. The point of clinical trials was completely obscured by this tabloid approach to reporting and it misrepresented many important aspects of medical research, without which, we would not have any of the new medications that treat common and uncommon illnesses from diabetes to dementia. We are very aware of these ethical issues and constantly work towards optimising communication and making the generous donation of these volunteers' time as positive an experience as possible.

In Victoria a uniform and very detailed document including all information which will be given to participants must be supplied to the Clinical Research and Ethics Committee of each relevant health area for scrutiny, prior to any patient involvement. These committees are independent bodies consisting of scientists, clinicians, lay people, lawyers and ministers of religion. The trial protocol and documents must meet Australian and world recognised guidelines.

Patients have the study explained to them by a member of the study team, usually the doctor. They often have a relative or friend with them and are encouraged to ask any questions or to discuss it with their local doctor. After signing, they take a copy of the information sheets and consent with them and this contains contact details of the trial team and a representative of the Clinical Research and Ethics Committee, should they be concerned about any aspect of the trial. It is emphasised in this information that

### Clinical Trials Issue

signing the consent is not binding and that as volunteers they can withdraw from the study at any time without it affecting their relationship with the study staff or their institute/hospital.

In my experience and dealings with fellow investigators, doctors do not get "kickbacks". All study staff are employed and paid by the facility running the study whether it is a research institute or hospital. The work in these studies must be meticulous and takes time and the trial sponsor remunerates the institute or hospital for this. Any study staff who have significant financial association with the sponsoring company must declare this to the Ethics Committee at protocol submission.

With respect to patients with intellectual or cognitive disabilities being exploited, if they and their family are keen to participate an application is made to the Victorian Civil and Administration Tribunal. Each case is heard and evaluated independently to ensure that there is no exploitation of these vulnerable patients. Prior to any agreements or lodging of applications, the patient and their families go through the same explanatory process and have the same rights and liberties as other patients.

By participating in Clinical Trials, patients suffering illnesses for which there are no gold standard therapies may have access to treatments that are not otherwise available. They may also pave the way for other future sufferers to have a better quality of life or even cure of their disease. This is particularly important in common conditions such as Alzheimer's dementia where its diagnosis, until recently, meant a relentless decline in thinking abilities, independence and behaviour for sufferers and their families. Presenting "Drug Trials" in a one sided way as an uncaring, exploitative, money raking production line only serves to work against the discovery of better medications with fewer side effects by discouraging volunteers to participate. One day, it may be you or a member of your family who faces the prospect of making one of these choices.

**YES!** *I would like to help ensure more people are "ageing well".*

Please accept my gift of:

\$25  \$50  \$100  \$200

my choice \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*All donations over \$2 are tax deductible*

**Name and address** (for receipt)

Title: Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss \_\_\_\_\_

First Name \_\_\_\_\_

Surname \_\_\_\_\_

Org. (if applies) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ P'code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

I enclose a cheque\*  
**OR** please debit my

Diners  Bankcard  Visa

Amex  Mastercard

for the total amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

\* payable to Ageing Well Foundation

*Further information overleaf*

Please return to:

*National Ageing Research Institute  
PO Box 31  
PARKVILLE VIC 3052  
AUSTRALIA*

*thank you*

**YES!** I would like to know more about "ageing well".

**Please send me more information on:**

- Becoming a NARI Volunteer
- Memory, pain, falls and wound clinics
- Current Research Projects
- Bequests and memorial gifts
- Sponsorship
- Education

**Please help us get to know you:**

How did you hear about NARI and the Ageing Well Foundation?

What are your main areas of interest?

- Ageing in general
- Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease
- Pain management
- Falls, balance, mobility
- Research (biological, clinical and public health)
- Education
- Other area(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Why are you interested in NARI and the Ageing Well Foundation?

- Self
- Family member
- Professional interest
- General interest

What age group do you belong to?

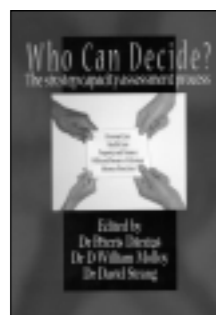
- under 30
- 31 - 40
- 41 - 50
- 51 - 60
- 61 - 70
- 71 - 80
- 81 - 90
- over 90

Other comments about NARI or feedback about *Ageing Well* newsletter:

## NARI Newpoints



We were very pleased to attend the recent launch of a new Ausmed Publication, *Ageing at Home: Practical Approaches to Community Care*. Edited by Theresa Cluning, with a foreword by Delys Sargeant (a past NARI Board member). Dr. Keith Hill (NARI) lead a collaborative group (Dr. Jenny Schwarz MECRS, Robyn Smith NARI, Belinda Gilsenan NARI and Karen Bull, Mt. Eliza Aged Care and Rehabilitation Service) to author the chapter "The Impact of Falls on Older People: How to Assess the Risks and Implement Prevention Strategies". The book is aimed at health care workers and could also be useful to older people and their carers when thinking about providing support that enables older people to continue living in the community. If you would like an order form for the book, please contact NARI reception on (03) 8387 2148.



Dr Peteris Darzins of NARI's Education Division is co-author of a recently published book *Who Can Decide?* The book which was officially launched in Canberra will be of interest to health professionals and the general public who care for people who may no longer be able to make decisions for themselves (such as personal, health care or financial decisions). The cost of the book is \$39.95. To obtain an order form contact Robyn Sloan on ph (03) 8387 2148 or via email; r.sloan@nari.unimelb.edu.au

## Upcoming Events

National Conference of the Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG)

### Ageing and Progress: Past, Present and Future

The mission of the AAG is "to expand the knowledge of ageing" and part of the way this is done is by promoting and supporting research along with promoting and providing education and informed debate.

The conference, which will be held from the 5th-7th September of this year at Rydges Lakeside in Canberra, will cover a number of issues relating to research, education, practice and policy in the field of ageing. This year's theme "Ageing and Progress: Past, Present and Future" will give delegates a chance to reflect on and learn from the past and present and think creatively about addressing the issues ahead.

For information, contact the AAG National Conference Secretariat, c/- Centre for Ageing Studies, The Mark Oliphant Building, Laffer Drive, Science Park, Bedford Park, SA 5042. Telephone: 08 8201 7567; Fax: 08 8201 7551 E-mail: aag.conference@flinders.edu.au Website: www.cas.flinders.edu.au/aag/

**MORE RESEARCH AND NEWS** →

*Turn over page*

*Getting to know...*  
**Dr Judy Dunai**



Dr Dunai obtained her PhD from the Department of Psychology at the University of Melbourne in 1997. She then worked at La Trobe University investigating attention and movement problems in people with Parkinson's disease and people who had suffered a stroke before coming to NARI in 1999.

"My work at NARI involves conducting research within the Cognitive Neuroscience group which I head, supervising PhD and honours students at NARI and Melbourne and La Trobe Universities, and assisting with medication trials conducted through the Clinical Trials Unit at NARI."

Research conducted in the Cognitive Neuroscience group includes studying the relationship between behaviour and the electrical activity of the brain as measured by the electroencephalogram (EEG).

Other research is focused on using EEG to investigate changes in brain function that occur in delirium, a disorder that affects older people particularly severely, and can be difficult to distinguish from dementia.

"My own special interest is the study of changes to cognitive function that occur with healthy ageing. I particularly enjoy this research because I believe it addresses concerns that many older people have about the effects of ageing on their thinking processes."

"Life has become rather hectic over the last year since the birth of my 4th son, and my shift to part time work at NARI, but I somehow seem to be able to combine both these important aspects of my life – although there's not much spare time left over!"

## Volunteering Opportunities



### Music, Ageing and Alzheimer's Disease

Dr Bruce Barber and Associate Professor Zeinab Khalil are seeking volunteers for a study of the effects of music on healthy older people and on people with Alzheimer's Disease (AD). There is much anecdotal evidence that music alleviates some of the symptoms of AD leading to improved quality of life for patients. This study will use scientific measures to examine the apparent therapeutic benefits of music. Positive results will encourage more widespread availability of music therapy for AD patients. Please contact the NARI office on (03) 8387 2148 for more information.

### How effective is Brotozine?

Brotozine is a new, local anaesthetic cream that has been shown to reduce pain in preliminary studies at other research institutions. We would like to test this new cream for its pain reducing effects in both older and younger populations. Hopefully, Brotozine will be a new form of treatment for the large number of older people who suffer from chronic pain. If you are pain free and would like to participate in this study, it would involve coming to NARI for several hours and asking you to fill out a number of questionnaires and have electrical stimulation applied to your arm at different intensities. If you are interested in participating please ring Miss Renee Rocuzzo on (03) 8387 2148 during business hours.

### Is it Delirium, Dementia or Normal Ageing?

This study is seeking right handed people aged 60+, without problems or confusion, no known neurological conditions and who can make their own way to NARI. We are also looking for people with a diagnosed dementia over the age of 60. If you know anyone with dementia who would like to volunteer for this study we would like to hear from you as well. The aim is to learn more about the nature of delirium and dementia and improve the knowledge about these two conditions. Volunteers will perform very simple tasks (e.g. reading) while their brainwaves are recorded (EEG), and answer short questionnaires. The study will commence in June/July 2001. For further information please contact Christel van Hintum on (03) 8387 2148 or on vanhintum@nari.unimelb.edu.au

### Changes to cognitive (thinking) processes in normal, healthy ageing

Normal healthy ageing is associated with changes in cognitive function such as increased forgetfulness and slower thinking processes. Defining normal age-related changes in cognition is essential for early identification of abnormal changes. We are currently studying the effects of healthy ageing on the ability to switch rapidly between different cognitive activities. We need right-handed volunteers, aged 65+ with normal or corrected to normal vision, and no known neurological conditions. Participants will be asked to complete a few short questionnaires and simple tasks (e.g. naming pictures and reading words presented on a computer screen). For further inquiries please call researcher Penny Amy on (03) 8387 2148.

### Alzheimer's Disease Drug Trial

NARI is currently running 3 trials looking at a new treatment for Alzheimer's Disease. We are seeking English speaking volunteers who:

- (1) Have noticed definite impairment in their memory and attention but do not have AD. OR
- (2) Have had AD diagnosed and are at home or in a hostel. OR
- (3) Have memory problems and symptoms similar to Parkinson's disease and are not taking other AD medication. Please call Aileen on (03) 8387 2148.

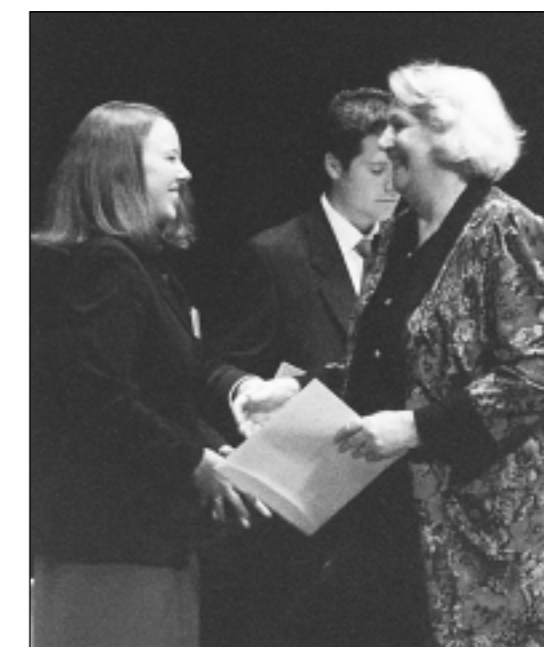
## Kate Fenton, NARI volunteer honoured

Kate Fenton, a volunteer for NARI, says "I'm not old, I've just been young for a very, very, very long time!" This may explain Kate's energetic outlook on life.

Kate left school at the age of 14 in 1938 but returned in 1991 to complete high school and obtain the Victorian Certificate of Education. Since then Kate has joined Deakin University and is set to graduate early next year with a double major in Professional Writing and Literature. She was nominated for membership in the Golden Key International Honour Society, an honour extended to students in the top 15 per cent of their field of study. This month Kate will be off to America where she is taking part in the university's student exchange program so will be sitting her exams in San Francisco.

"I was once asked what the best time in my life was, and I answered the best time is right now. I look on retirement as a beginning not an end. I feel like I'm in the middle of my second career."

Kate is writing a book on Police Training in the 21st Century. She explores the difficulties in joining the police academy. While gathering information for this book,



*Mrs Kate Fenton, right, receiving her membership into the Golden Key International Honour Society*

Kate attended Orientation Day, Induction Day and Police Physical Pursuit Day – although she didn't participate!

Kate doesn't seem to have much spare time in between going to university and writing her book, yet she does find time for volunteering. At NARI she gives lectures to the 4th year medical students. Kate also volunteers at Donvale Living and Learning Centre, tutors children at Parkmore Primary School as well as helping out at Vermont Secondary School.

"I want to put something back into the community. I believe that you need passion and purpose in your life."

## Farewell to Florence Houghton



*Mrs Florence Houghton and Associate Professor Zeinab Khalil*

Mrs Florence Houghton, a cherished volunteer for NARI, sadly passed away on the 21st April. Mrs Houghton had been involved as a volunteer with NARI for nine years. At the age of 95 she was still giving lectures to medical students and was involved in various research activities. She received Senior Achiever of the Year award in 1999, in recognition of the valuable work she undertook within the community. Her motto for life was "Living, Loving, Learning, Looking, Listening and Laughing." Mrs Houghton was a true inspiration to us all.

## Healthy Living Tips

### BREAST SCREENING

As we get older we need to take special care of our health. For women 50 years and over this includes having regular, two-yearly breast x-rays to check for early signs of breast cancer.

Breast cancer is the most common cause of death from cancer in Australian women.

75% of breast cancers are diagnosed in women over 50 years. Unfortunately the cause of breast cancer is still not known.

Research has demonstrated that a well-organised mammography-screening program can reduce the mortality from breast cancer by up to 30%.

Early detection of breast cancer increases opportunities for successful treatment and well being.

BreastScreen Victoria provides free screening mammography to women over the age of 50 years when screening is known to be most effective.

For further information or an appointment please phone 132050 (Australia wide).

BreastScreen Victoria