



# Ageing Well

## National Ageing Research Institute

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## Know the 'red flags' of elder abuse

An integrated service response involving doctors, social workers and police, familiar with the 'red flags' of possible elder abuse, was an effective way to support older, vulnerable people.

This was the key message from international elder abuse expert, Professor Laura Mosqueda, Director of the Irvine Center of Excellence in Elder Abuse and Neglect in California, speaking at a seminar hosted by NARI, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Senior Rights Victoria. More than 100 people attended the session.

Professor Mosqueda also suggested complementing the integrated response with research and education programs.

The 'red flags' of possible elder abuse include vague or implausible explanations of injuries by caregivers, delay in seeking help when required and inconsistent stories. Physical clues were sores and bruises, untidy appearance, poor hygiene, malnutrition and dehydration.

Professor Mosqueda says older people may not ask for help or volunteer what has happened. However, if astute health professionals ask specific questions to clients about being hurt or afraid of someone, then a different and more disturbing picture may emerge.

"The reasons why older people are abused or exploited by people close to them are complex," she said.

"Contributing causes include a dependency on others for assistance, being unable to defend themselves physically or emotionally, fear of losing their independence and deep feelings of shame."



NARI Director of Preventive and Public Health, Dr Briony Dow, (left) with elder abuse expert Professor Laura Mosqueda.

## What's your opinion?

"Some newsletter readers will receive a short survey about attitudes to elder abuse among health professionals and members of the public. This is part of a NARI research study with University College London.

The project represents our initial commitment to an issue that NARI views as important to our future research program and the wellbeing of older people in Australia. We look forward to your involvement and thank you for your support."

PROFESSOR DAVID AMES, NARI DIRECTOR

## Thinking of you...

We extend our best wishes and sympathy to everyone affected by the tragic bushfires in Victoria.

PROFESSOR DAVID AMES AND STAFF

## The secret elixir to healthy ageing



The Women's Healthy Ageing Project (WHAP) could reveal the secret elixir to successful healthy ageing, suggests NARI senior research fellow, Dr Cassandra Szoeko.

She has received a prestigious NHMRC Australia Clinical Fellowship for four years, to continue her work on a project that she believes has the potential to drive policy changes on women's health in Australia.

With this grant, she is investigating heart health, hormones and genetics as predictors of memory decline in older women.

"WHAP comprises a unique cohort of Australian women and contains such a depth of data that it could possibly inform women on every aspect of healthy ageing. However, these women need to be followed up regularly so we can analyse their health changes over the years – and that requires continued funding," says Dr Szoeko.

WHAP is an extension of the 1990s Melbourne Women's Midlife Health Project, headed by Professor Lorraine Dennerstein, so the data on the study's participants spans almost 20 years.

"It's very exciting to be able to follow a group of women since they were in their 40s. We can look at what they were doing back then and where they are now health-wise," she says.

In a related study, Dr Szoeko has received a grant from the Scobie and Claire MacKinnon Trust to analyse the consequences of mild to moderate vitamin D deficiency on bone and muscle disease in women.

"This level of vitamin D deficiency is relatively common in Australia but the health consequences are poorly understood. The effects may include bone fragility, muscle weakness and a tendency to fall," she says.

## Our wonderful volunteers

Twins Lyn and Jen O'Connor and Mary Keusgen (centre) were among the 100 volunteers at NARI's 'thank you' afternoon tea in December, at the Moonee Valley Racecourse. Story: page 2



## Our wonderful volunteers

At NARI's 'thank you' afternoon tea, volunteers enjoyed socialising and discovering more about NARI's research.

They gained an insight into pain in older people, the Older Australian Twins Study with its focus on healthy ageing, and an update of the Well for Life resource kits.

"The afternoon tea enables us to thank our wonderful volunteers for being involved in our research and to hear their impressions of NARI's work," says Executive Manager, Debra O'Connor.



Enjoying NARI's 'thank you' afternoon tea are twin sisters Diane Turner (left) and Deidre Gilham.

### Interested in volunteering?

NARI is updating its volunteer database so now is an ideal time to tell us the type of research projects and other volunteering roles that interest you.

Thank you to the volunteers who have already completed the questionnaire that was distributed with the December 2008 *Ageing Well*.

#### To obtain a copy of the questionnaire

PHONE: 8387 2305 EMAIL: [info@nari.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:info@nari.unimelb.edu.au)

## \$30,000 dementia grant

A study investigating how the brain's processing of perception, attention and memory changes with dementia is the focus of a \$30,000 grant from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust. It involves testing three groups – patients with dementia, healthy older people and healthy younger people.

The project was prompted by electrophysical data that was recorded from older people with dementia during research into the benefits of music therapy.

## In the AAG spotlight

NARI was in the spotlight at the Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) Conference in Perth, in November, with four presentations and three posters.

NARI Director, Professor David Ames, gave a keynote address about the Australian Imaging Biomarkers and Lifestyle study. He heads this CSIRO flagship study that aims to create a better understanding of Alzheimer's disease.

Professor Keith Hill discussed the FROP-Com falls risk screening tool, Claudia Meyer spoke about falls in older people receiving care at home and Xiao Jing Yang shared her PhD research into early screening for balance dysfunction in older people. Drs Briony Dow and Colleen Doyle presented posters.

Claudia and Jing also spoke at the AAG's Emerging Researchers in Ageing Conference.

## Carers fall into depression

People receiving care at home had a high risk of falls and when multiple incidents happened, the carers were vulnerable to depression.

These were among the findings of the Caring is no Accident project involving NARI, Mewca, Carers' Choice Ballarat, and a group of 96 carers and care recipients. Participants were initially assessed and then they recorded any adverse incidents that occurred during the following 12 months.

"Carers highlighted the pressure of having to be constantly vigilant about the possibility of a fall occurring and they reported difficulty in sleeping because they felt that they needed to be constantly on-call," says NARI researcher Claudia Meyer.

"About 15 per cent of this group experienced moderate to severe levels of carer burden."

In other findings, an increase in falls was reported when people receiving care went into a different environment, for instance, during the transition to respite care and back home again.

The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing funded the study.



Claudia Meyer continued her focus on carers to successfully complete her Masters of Public Health from the University of Melbourne. She investigated why people did not use respite care.

## Education roundup

### WEEKLY SEMINARS

NARI's seminar series looks set to stimulate more interest since changing from fortnightly to a weekly event.

NARI has combined with the Royal Melbourne Hospital Royal Park Clinical Campus to present research seminars and clinical meetings, featuring local and overseas medical and scientific experts.

The seminars are on Tuesdays from noon to 1pm. The venue is the NARI Seminar Room, Building 9, Poplar Road, Parkville. Everyone is welcome

#### FOR DETAILS, CONTACT DR BRUCE BARBER

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### TRAINING WORKSHOPS

Ensuring best practice in clinical care is the impetus for NARI's innovative education and training program.

The sessions will ensure that NARI's latest research results are available to healthcare professionals, researchers and organisations.

#### FOR DETAILS, CONTACT CLAUDIA MEYER

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## A busy time

This column was penned during early February, which is a busy time at NARI – staff return from summer holidays, teaching of medical and other health science students recommences, and research grant proposals to the National Health and Medical Research Council are refined for submission in mid-March.

Recent days have been made more challenging by the extreme summer heat, and the appalling tragedy of the Victorian bushfires. Some of our staff have been directly affected and others have helped with relief efforts. All staff at NARI extend their best wishes and sympathy to all have been affected by these awful events.

Since our last newsletter, we have had our AGM. It was a low-key event compared to the 2007 meeting, as the NARI seminar two weeks earlier provided our main public focus for research dissemination during 2008. Nevertheless, it was an important AGM as NARI's strategic plan, which will guide our research agenda for the next five years, was formally adopted. Copies of the plan are available from the NARI website.

Finally, I am pleased to report that we are now collaborating more closely with our near neighbours, the Mental Health Research Institute of Victoria (MHRI). Following the retirement of our finance officer Keith Montell, MHRI staff have been subcontracted to provide payroll, finance and information technology services to NARI. This is a great example of efficient and mutually beneficial collaboration, and the arrangements seem to be working very well, indeed.

PROFESSOR DAVID AMES, NARI DIRECTOR

## NARI Board news

“The NARI Board continues to evolve, with members sharing their expertise and enthusiasm in helping NARI to achieve its vision of excellence in research into ageing, and improving older people's health and wellbeing.

We are delighted to welcome new Board member, lawyer Michael Gorton AM. A partner at Russell Kennedy Solicitors, he brings to NARI his considerable experience with community and charitable organisations, including his current role as chairperson of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

Two inaugural NARI Board members, Alan Castleman and Judith King, retired after giving 14 years of service each, and Professor Fred Mendelsohn has also retired. Their combined contribution and support have been invaluable.

Mr Castleman served as Board president from 1999 to 2005, during a challenging time, financially and organisationally, for the Institute. His astute leadership and commitment during these years deserve the highest commendation. As chairperson of Australian Unity, he generously sponsored NARI's AGMs and Biennial Seminars.

During her 14 years as Board vice president, company director Ms King worked tirelessly for NARI. Similarly, Professor Mendelsohn's insight and experience in scientific and medical research were greatly valued.”

THE HON MICHAEL MACKELLER, NARI BOARD PRESIDENT

## FROM FINANCE TO ALPACAS

After more than four years as NARI's finance officer, Keith Montell intends to enjoy his retirement at his alpaca farm. At his farewell function, Keith (second from left) is with, Debra O'Connor (NARI Executive Manager), Colin Smith (NARI Board member), The Hon Michael MacKellar (NARI Board President) and Professor David Ames (NARI Director).



## Thank you

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

Ms H Byers

Mr C Collins

Mrs Pina Croci

Mr and Mrs Dowland

Ms Jeanne Fletcher

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Ms Kathleen L Moyle

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Ms DA Scott

Mr J Smith

Mrs Lola Stewart

Mr Jack Wilkinson

## 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.

## I/We would like to donate \$ .....

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Please tick (✓) the box if you consent to your name/s being published in future NARI publications.

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PO Box 2127, Royal Melbourne Hospital Victoria 3050

**Donations of \$2 and over are fully tax deductible** AW 49

Thank you

## Gihan's dream

Research assistant Gihan de Mel has left NARI to pursue his dream – to study medicine at the University of Notre Dame in Sydney.

During his 18 months at NARI, he was involved in the Emergency Department falls screening project, the person-centred care project and the Older Australian Twins Study. He still administers NARI's website.

"I have really enjoyed working at NARI. Now, I am looking forward to the next four years as a medical student, knowing that it will bring new challenges and add to the experiences that I gained at NARI," he said.



Working on the Older Australian Twins Study. Gihan de Mel (centre) with Professor David Ames (NARI Director) and Simone Mangelsdorf.

## Overseas visitors



Hong Kong geriatrician, Dr Willie Leung, (pictured) visited NARI to gain an insight into the latest strategies for managing challenging behaviours in people with dementia. During his six-week stay, he also worked with NARI staff on falls prevention.

Dutch exercise therapist Teddy Oosterhuis completed a research project for her Masters of Science, during her three-month visit to NARI.

Her literature review highlighted that a history of stroke or osteoarthritis and peripheral fractures or injuries from a fall were predictors of long-term decline in physical function in older people.



## Welcome back

Research assistant Christel Lemmon is pleased to be back at NARI.

Originally from The Netherlands, she spent a year at NARI in 1996 as part of her Masters in Psychology and returned in 1998 to do a PhD. From 2000 to 2005, she worked with NARI Director, Professor David Ames, in the Cognitive Dementia and Memory Service.

"I am delighted to be working again with Professor Ames, this time on the Older Australian Twins Study. I enjoy research involving older people, and I also like the friendly and supportive atmosphere at NARI," she says.

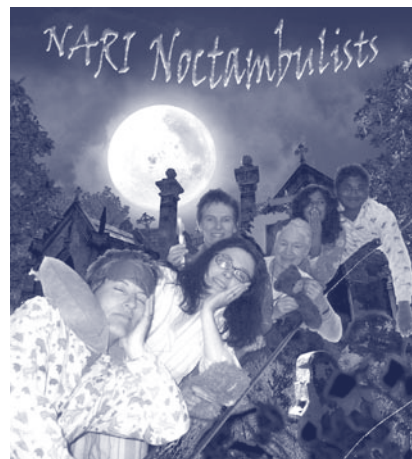
## A winning look

The NARI Noctambulists created the winning image in a photography competition for the 2008 Melbourne Health's Step Challenge.\*

True to their name, the team members dressed as nightwalkers for the photo shoot and then computer whiz Gihan de Mel added the final touches by placing the team under a full moon in a spooky graveyard.

"It would have been nice to have notched up more steps and had a higher ranking in the competition, but winning the best photo category was great," says Dr Elizabeth Cyarto.

"The highlight of the awards ceremony was meeting keynote speaker and Oarsome Foursome Olympic gold medallist, Drew Ginn."



More than 1200 Melbourne Health staff members participated in the Step Challenge and, in just 28 days, registered over 300 million steps.

\*See: Every step counts, Ageing Well, December 2008

The NARI Noctambulists with their winning look. From left, Dr Elizabeth Cyarto, Frances Batchelor, Dr Briony Dow, Dr Jean Tinney, Chathushka Fonseka and Gihan de Mel.

## Creative cookies



A Christmas tree decorated with 80 home-baked gingerbread cookies earned five creative NARI researchers second prize in a Christmas baking competition.

Another key ingredient of their entry involved giving their gingerbread tree to Parkville hostel residents.

Sue Hunt, Courtney Hempton, Frances Batchelor and Dr Elizabeth Cyarto created the concept and then spent

an enjoyable Saturday afternoon baking the biscuits. Dr Irene Blackberry also shared her creative ideas.

They submitted their entry in the innovation category of the Bake-Off competition organised by the Royal Melbourne Hospital (Royal Park campus).