



Ageing Well

National Ageing Research Institute

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Successful seminar marks NARI's 25 years

The National Ageing Research Institute followed its brief for taking a broad perspective – by reflecting on the major issues affecting Australia's ageing population, at a recent seminar to celebrate 25 years of achievement.

Economics, health, health-care and research topped the agenda, with presentations by leading experts to a high-profile audience.

The seminar, 'Maximising the benefits of Australia's demographic changes', was generously sponsored by Australian Unity at its impressive conference centre, together with the CSIRO and NHMRC.



NARI Director, Professor Allan McLean, and Emeritus Professor Sir Gustav Nossal.

In his inimitable and masterly style, Emeritus Professor Sir Gustav Nossal chaired the proceedings as five speakers shared their considerable expertise. They were Allen Consulting Group Co-chairman, Dr Vince Fitzgerald; Anglican Aged Care Services Group Executive Director, Helen Kurincic; General Manager, Service Sector CSIRO

Telecommunications and Industrial Physics, Dr Robert Gill; the Federal Minister for Ageing, the Hon Kevin Andrews, and NARI Director, Professor Allan McLean.

More than 160 people attended, including senior personnel from Commonwealth and State Government departments, leading clinical and basic scientists and medical professionals from major institutes, and representatives from community organisations.

"People involved in ageing issues heard top-class speakers, and the question time after each session offered vigorous debate," said seminar organiser the Hon. Michael MacKellar.

Professor McLean said practical solutions emerged, with one important concept being that the expertise existed to take action, but systems had to be open-minded about change. His speech emphasised enhancing older people's autonomy.



NARI President Alan Castleman with the Federal Minister for Ageing, the Hon Kevin Andrews.

NARI President Alan Castleman was delighted by the high-level participation and support for NARI. He was also impressed by the CSIRO's scientific and technological research commitment to older people's health and independence as outlined by Dr Gill.

"The seminar tapped into the interests of consumer representatives enabling them to participate fully," said Mr Castleman.

Dr Fitzgerald highlighted how people's productivity peaked at about 55 years, and declined minimally with time. Consequently, if people in this age range had the opportunity to work longer, Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) could increase significantly.

Helen Kurincic made an eloquent plea on behalf of carers, particularly of the frail aged, for greater recognition through improved work benefits. In his speech, Mr Andrews emphasised the government's priority to the issues of Australia's ageing population and preventive health programs.



Question time: Dr Graeme Killer, principal medical advisor, at the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Dr Killer gave a positive insight into ageing, by saying, "Of the 75% of veterans in the older age-group, only 25% are using health services."

From the chairman ...

Australia's demographic changes present many inter-connecting and challenging issues, but a combination of extensive research and sound policies will improve the complex scenarios facing older people, says Emeritus Professor Sir Gustav Nossal, who chaired NARI's seminar.

The wide-ranging concerns include intensifying medical and health-care research to overcome age-related diseases, changing employment policies to enable later retirement, improving community care for older people living in their homes, and reforming superannuation and the tax system.

He said although Australia's health-care costs comprised about 9% of GDP, cost pressures would intensify with demographic changes. Australia will have almost 1.7 million people aged 75plus by 2020.

Another concern is the Australian incidence of abuse against older people when US statistics highlight that up to five percent of this group are victims.

Of NARI, Sir Gustav remarked, "The Institute's 25th anniversary is eminently worth celebrating. NARI has an enormous contribution to make in medical and health research."

More seminar reports inside

From the speakers...

An economic solution

Developing employment opportunities for interested, mature-aged people is a key factor for meeting the increasing costs of care as they age, advises Allen Consulting Group Co-chairman, Dr Vince Fitzgerald.



People's ability to do certain tasks changes with age but experience, judgement and personal skills keep developing. Placing people in the right work roles creates personal fulfilment and has positive economic consequences. For instance, they have money for future needs and their taxes boost Australia's Gross Domestic Product, channelling significantly more dollars into quality health and aged-care services.

He says some corporations are creating new jobs for this age group, but governments need to play their part by reforming the tax and social security systems, and labour practices.

Create the future for aged-care services

Managing aged-care services today involves standing in the future – and creating it, declares Anglican Aged Care Services Group Executive Director, Helen Kurincic.

Many key issues require attention, including measuring aged-care outcomes by client satisfaction, easier access to services and implementing evidence-based practice Australia-wide.

Another priority is new and flexible career models to attract nurses and health-care workers to this sector. Ms Kurincic said despite 42 inquiries into nursing during the past seven years, nothing had changed in delivering aged-care services.

"Action is needed. We need to follow the strategies researched by the best companies worldwide – if you are 70% clear, begin to implement, and refine as you go," she said.

"It's better to implement a half-baked idea by passionate people than to implement the perfect idea by people who don't care."



Enjoying the seminar



Above left: Professor Dennis Lowther (left) and Janet Wood, members of the Ministerial Advisory Council of Senior Victorians, with Sir Gustav Nossal

Above right: (from left) NARI Board member John Grace, Emeritus Professor Bob Foster, NARI President Alan Castleman and NARI Deputy Director, Associate Professor Zeinab Khalil

Left: (from left) Dr Lynne Cobac from the CSIRO, Bob Solly from the Victorian Department of Veterans' Affairs, Dr Laurie Wilson from the CSIRO, and NARI Board member Kate Spargo

Technology in people's lives

Technology can make a difference in people's lives, but new aids for living must not replace human care, says the General Manager, Service Sector CSIRO Telecommunications and Industrial Physics, Dr Robert Gill.

One innovative CSIRO project, The Preventative Health Program, is developing new methods to diagnose and treat major diseases, like colorectal cancer, and neurodegenerative and cardiovascular diseases. The program emphasises analysis of major data to identify trends and guide policy development.

The CSIRO is also developing an inconspicuous, personal monitoring-system with a short-distance link to a telephone. The monitor senses a person's movements, monitors the heart, and activates an alarm if the person has problems, including falls.

Priorities for health care and research

An ageing population and the prevalence of musculoskeletal and neurodegenerative diseases in this age group would become the overwhelming priorities of health care and research in the first half of this century, said the Federal Minister for Ageing, the Hon Kevin Andrews.

Allied to this is the challenge issued to Australia, by the World Health Organisation, for preventive programs that promote an additional six years of healthy life.

This concept of promoting and maintaining good health ranks in the National Research Priorities for an Ageing Australia.

Mr Andrews indicated the government was working to develop the full potential of aged and community care. Projects included providing high-quality aged care in people's homes, and hospital-standard care in aged-care homes.

Older people value their autonomy

For older people admitted to hospital, their most important concern was being able to return home because that reflected their wishes for control over their lives and autonomy, said NARI Director, Professor Allan McLean.

However, adhering to older people's values involves placing priorities on and allocating resources to several target areas – efficient and effective acute and subacute care, preventing existing diseases, and promoting the concept of healthy ageing.

In the hospital-care sphere, the most effective model encompasses individual project management for patients, dealing with the problem leading to hospital admission, coordinated care by multi-disciplinary teams, and implementing evidence-based, best-practice clinical care.

When this approach was used during a six-year study at Canberra Hospital, the hospital stay for frail, older people decreased, on average, by more than 75%.



(From left) Professor David Copolov from the Mental Health Research Institute, Dr Robert Gill from the CSIRO and NARI seminar organiser, the Hon Michael MacKellar



We are leaders in ageing research. Your donation will help us maintain the pace.

Looking to the future, Australia will have six million people over the age of 65 by the year 2050. They will comprise 25 percent of the population.

The issues surrounding ageing are complex. At this time of life, the major health concerns include diseases of ageing, dementia, falls, wounds and pain management.

NARI leads the way in Australia as the only Institute for ageing that takes research from cell biology to service delivery and public health. We need your support to continue our work.

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Thank you



NARI news

A positive message to 800 people

More than 800 people heard NARI Deputy Director, Associate Professor Zeinab Khalil, relate a positive approach to ageing at the Melbourne Conversations series, in March, at the Melbourne Town Hall.

She was among a panel of prominent speakers discussing the topic, 'Ageing in Melbourne: challenging the perceptions'.

Other panel members were former Victorian Premier Sir Rupert Hamer, 2001 Victorian Senior of the Year, Sonja Rutherford, and the Executive Director of Council on the Ageing, Sue Hendry. The chairperson was 774 radio presenter Tonya Roberts.



Associate Professor Khalil proved to be a popular choice during question time, with interest focusing on whether life expectancy would increase if all the leading causes of death were overcome.

"In this scenario, the life expectancy would only increase by about 15 years. The human body is not geared to live indefinitely," says Associate Professor Khalil.

"The positive definition of ageing relates to the positive changes from conception to death; this means everybody in the community is ageing."

Can you help?

Volunteers are needed for studies assessing the effectiveness of the newer medications in reducing the risk of heart disease.

NARI and the Royal Melbourne Hospital's cardiology and neurology departments are participating in long-term, worldwide studies investigating the best prescribing combinations of the newer-approved drugs.

The studies are seeking participants, who have experienced cardiovascular problems (like heart disease or diabetes), are susceptible to stroke, or suffer from circulation problems in the legs.

For more details, telephone NARI research nurse Shelley Waters on 8387 2570 or 0407 664 005.

NARI's success at pain conference

NARI's work on pain management shared a top prize at the Australian and New Zealand Pain Society's annual scientific conference, in Christchurch, in March.

Another NARI success story at the conference was the overwhelming interest in senior research fellow Dr Mike Farrell's invited plenary lecture to almost 700 delegates.

Associate Professor Stephen Gibson accepted the prize – pain textbooks valued at \$500 – for the best free paper presentation at the conference. His talk described NARI's research on the variations in treatment outcomes after multi-disciplinary pain management.

Dr Farrell's lecture about pain-related, functional brain imaging was a compelling perspective on how this state-of-the-art technology is being used to improve clinicians' understanding about pain processes and what patients are experiencing.



A new dimension

Informing people about ageing took on a visual dimension when NARI Director, Professor Allan McLean, and Associate Professor Zeinab Khalil were interviewed for the ABC program, *New Dimensions with George Negus*.

Topics discussed included NARI's research into wound healing, the new skin test for the early diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, falls prevention and facts about ageing.

In brief ...

NARI PhD student, physiotherapist Kate Murray, received a two-year Garnett Passe and Rodney Williams Memorial Foundation project grant to assess the effectiveness of vestibular rehabilitation for people with inner-ear problems.

NARI researcher Lisa Engel is the recipient of a \$40,000 Diabetes Australia Research Trust Grant, for a 12-month project investigating whether wearing a pedometer (a small device measuring the number of steps taken) influences the exercise behaviour of older people with Type 2 diabetes.

Full reports in the next *Ageing Well*.