

Ageing Mind Initiative Newsletter

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**Please direct all enquiries
to ami@uq.edu.au**

Welcome to the Ageing Mind Initiative Newsletter

The Ageing Mind Initiative has had another hectic month. After recovering from the multitude of lectures, seminars and workshops being held in August and September, it is now time to look forward to the final months of what has been a very exciting year.

If you are a keen research participant you will be delighted to know that in this week's newsletter we have three whole pages (pg 4, 5 & 6) of research studies that are currently being conducted in ageing. Be sure to read the information provided carefully, for in some cases prior participation in certain studies may preclude you from becoming involved.

There are also updates on two exciting pieces of research at The University of Queensland on page 2. The two research topics are managing finances in later life and happiness and ageing. Be sure to take a look.

Finally, thanks must again be extended to all students and staff at The University of Queensland for continuing to progress, with tireless effort in pursuing research in the field of ageing. There has also be a phenomenal response from the community in responding to ads about upcoming research projects, so the most sincerest thanks to all those participants. Without them, none of this research would be possible.

The next AMI newsletter will follow up on some of the advertised research projects included in this newsletter. We are hoping to report back to you with interesting findings so stay tuned! See what sort of results your participation is producing.



Updates on AMI Projects and Research

Managing Finances in Later Life

Dr Donna Pinsker



The current financial crisis has left millions of retirees scrambling to make ends meet. Managing one's financial affairs can be a highly complex exercise. Many financial decisions involve numerous alternatives and potential consequences. There is a dearth of investment schemes on the market promising large returns and long-term financial security.

A majority of older people have the financial knowledge and experience to manage their finances independently. People with significant memory problems due to dementia, however, raise considerable uncertainty. At what point is the person no longer capable of managing his or her financial affairs independently? At what point is he or she at undue risk of financial exploitation? At what point does the need to prevent harm override a person's right to autonomy and independence? These are some of the important yet perplexing questions which confront family members, medical practitioners, psychologists, and legal professionals.

At the heart of the issue of deciding whether someone should intervene and take over a person's financial affairs is a question of capacity. As individuals are forced to take greater personal control of their own financial security, one of the great challenges facing researchers and clinicians is to develop a comprehensive, reliable, and valid means of identifying older people with impaired financial capacity. Diminished capacity can result in poor financial decisions, victimisation, self-improvement, and vulnerability to undue influence. At present, however, there is no universal standard for evaluating capacity in this context, and issues pertaining to the level of impairment which constitutes incapacity remain largely unresolved.

A group of researchers at The University of Queensland, working in conjunction with the Office of the Adult Guardian, Queensland, are conducting an important research project investigating the capacity of older people to manage their financial affairs (see study blurb on pg 5). An improved means to identify individuals with impaired financial capacity will ultimately help to protect the economic resources and emotional well-being of older adults and their families.

Happiness and Ageing

Prof Bill von Hippel



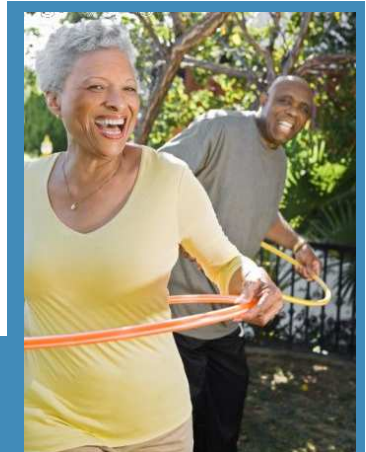
Happiness. What is it, who has it and how do we get it? One thing that Professor Bill von Hippel from The University of Queensland has found is that older adults are better at it than younger adults.

Studies have found that all individuals have a baseline level of happiness. While it is largely unexplained why some individuals are more happy than others, it has been shown that one of the most effective things that raises your baseline happiness is having close positive relationships (provided you are above the poverty line). In line with this research, it has also been found that older adults value their relationships more and spend more time investing in maintaining the quality of those relationships. This in turn, contributes to a happier state of their mind than perhaps younger cohorts, who have had less time to strengthen and foster

those important bonds.

Buddhist monks and individuals who regularly engage in meditation show brain data that registers a high degree of happiness. This has been linked to their ability to remain in the present, appreciating and enjoying the current moment. Having deadlines, worrying about the future and stressing about the past have all been shown to decrease your happiness. Like Buddhist monks, older adults are better at avoiding these negative ways of thinking. It has been found that older adults are much better at stopping to "smell the roses" and it seems to contribute to their positive frame of mind.

For more information on the research discussed above, please contact Prof Bill Von Hippel at b.vonhippel@uq.edu.au



Positive Success at the PAJ Symposium!

5th Oct 2009 - Emma Poulsen



On Friday 25th September, the the Positive Ageing Journey Symposium was held at Eagle Farm Racecourse. The beautiful location all but enhanced what was reported by the attendees to be an informative and inspiring day of lectures. The symposium set out to offer constructive advice to prolong their independent living, social, cognitive and functional wellbeing into later life and it more than delivered.

For some, the lecture on pet therapy by Maggie O'Haire and her rescued pound poodle Hugo was the winner of the day. Maggie presented statistics on how owning and interacting with a pet assists in reducing stress levels, your risk of heart disease and improves your general wellbeing. From owning a dog to simply having a bird bath in your garden, these effects have been found to be robust and consistent. Although many pet owners in the audience claimed they already had complete confidence in the truth of these words, it was nice to see it replicated so soundly in research.

Other lectures included an involved discussion on sexual health for older adults by Sue Gledhill. The talk covered the importance of having a forum in your life to discuss sexuality where you feel safe. Indeed, older adults are no less sexual beings than younger adults, despite some of the negative and ageist stereotypes that suggest otherwise. The lecture was so uplifting that by the end, audience members were sharing stories and making recommendations about positive understanding GP's in their local areas.

Horticultural therapy (the benefits of gardening), was covered by Celebrity Gardener John Hawkins who told his story of an impressive gardening history that helped him through the challenging phases of his life battling health and heart problems. Another celebrity appearance was from Glen Barratt, accompanied by nutritionist Dr Olivia Wright. Together they presented delicious dishes that had the audience's mouths watering and craving lunch, describing in detail the nutritional value of each ingredient.

Family care giving, managing finances, volunteering in

later life, travel tips, grandparenting and exercise and physical activity were also covered in the scope of the day. By the ends of it everyone's brains were bursting with interesting tips, research findings and motivation to begin or continue their own positive ageing journey. However, perhaps the highlight of the day was the closing panel for the evening, a panel of three inspiring individuals Dr Douglas Mercer, Di Agnew and Pixie Annat who shared their own positive ageing journey.

Doug Mercer completed his Bachelor of Engineering in 1946 and spent 40 years working in the field. After retirement, on a challenge from his wife he returned to study history, culminating in achieving a PhD in 2002, in his late 70s. Doug summarised the success of positive ageing as having a healthy curiosity, to pursue that curiosity with life-long learning and to surround yourself with supportive people to help you achieve that.

Di Agnew was a similarly impressive individual. After retirement, Di became passionate about making a difference in the field of Aboriginal education and set off to make a difference with her husband. Di became involved in The Indigenous Skills Transfer and Exchange Partnership (INSTEP), a community service initiative of National Seniors Australia. Having been immersed in a completely unique culture and been provided with an avenue to give so deeply to a community, Di summarised her success in positive ageing as putting yourself out of your comfort zone and seeking new and challenging experiences that enrich your life.

Pixie Annat, the last speaker for the evening had a long and well respected work life in health, starting as a trainee nurse, and retiring as a CEO of a major local private health service in Brisbane. Listening to Pixie share her stories it was clear that she still lead a fiery and vibrant life, was unafraid of facing challenges and held no regrets.

Listening to the successful ageing stories of these three individuals was in itself the perfect summary of all of the research presented in the lectures. It highlighted that while an incredible depth of knowledge can be tapped into through the 'experts', some of the most useful kernels of knowledge come from the everyday individuals who have simply lived through it themselves.





Get Involved in UQ Ageing Research

Home-based Music Therapy for spousal carers and people with dementia

Music Therapy is recognized as a therapy that can assist people with dementia to recall special memories and events, which can be used to improve meaningful communication and interaction with other people, including with the spouse caregiver. Music can also affect mood and facilitate the release of tension and stress which may lead to decreased feelings of caregiver burden, anxiety and/or depression. This means that music can be beneficial for both you and your partner.

This research project is investigating the effectiveness of a home-based music program on the quality of life and well-being of both carer and spouse with dementia. To gain an understanding of the effectiveness of the music program, the project also involves some participants completing a reading intervention. The project is inviting couples where one spouse is the caregiver of the other spouse who has dementia to participate in the study.

The aim of the project focuses on both the needs of the carer and of the partner with dementia. This research project encourages the carer, to spend quality time with their partner, sharing and re-living special times through the use of music and/or reading. After reading or listening to meaningful music, the couple can share and discuss those special memories with each other. This can create a meaningful and useful tool of communication that is beneficial for both the carer and their partner.

The project is run through the University of Queensland and participation in this project is **free**. For more information on being a part of this project, please contact:

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Seeking Participants for an Osteoarthritis Study

Osteoarthritis (OA) is an extremely common condition among older Australians. It is rated as the leading cause of disability in older people, with estimated costs to the Australian economy of more than \$24 billion a year in medical care.

A trial of an innovative non pharmacologically-based intervention to assist with pain and coping in osteoarthritis is underway in the School of Psychology at the University of Queensland.

We are looking for subjects aged 65 and over, with a diagnosis of osteoarthritis, who are willing to participate in this 8 week trial at the University.

Interested parties can contact **Dr. Natasha Koloski** on 0407-126-897 for details about the study.

Sibling Relationships & Grief Research

As part of my Doctorate in Psychology through James Cook University I am researching family and sibling relationships and the experience (either real or hypothesised) of sibling grief. This study involves looking at peoples' personalities, their family relationships and structure and their feelings following either the real or imagined death or loss of a brother or sister. In this study the term sibling refers to someone, either related or unrelated, with whom you have lived in a family type relationship (eg. Twin, step sibling, close cousin, foster sibling etc).

You are eligible for this study if you are criteria aged 55 years or older, have a sibling or have experienced the death of a sibling (more than 6 months ago). Participants will complete a questionnaire package via mail.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions please contact **CHANTEL LEVKOVICH** Phone: 0407 718 680 or Email: chantel.levkovich@jcu.edu.au



Get Involved in UQ Ageing Research

Seeking Participants for a Study in How People Manage their Finances

In older people with dementia, a diminished capacity to manage finances can result in poor financial decisions, victimisation, self-improvement, and vulnerability to exploitation. However, deciding what, if any, aspects of their financial affairs an older person with dementia can responsibly manage is a difficult process for family members, and health and legal professionals. Currently, no comprehensive or standardised set of measures exists, either nationally or internationally, for determining this important aspect of daily living. In conjunction with the Office of the Adult Guardian, Queensland, we are investigating the usability of an innovative protocol for determining the capacity of older people with dementia to manage their finances. As part of this research, we would like to interview people **who do not have dementia** and a member of their family or a friend to ascertain how healthy older people and their families respond on the questionnaires.

Participation in this research involves one two-hour session, conducted conveniently in your home. The session includes some brief questionnaires, and simulated financial tasks such as writing cheques and reading bank statements. We will also ask a family member or friend of your choice to participate in an interview. We will ask your relative or friend questions about how they view aspects of your social and everyday functioning.

If you are aged 60 years or over and are interested in participating, please contact the study's Project Officer on **3365 5572**. Your participation will help the Office of the Adult Guardian to work better in the future with potentially vulnerable older people.

Memory and Communication Training in Dementia Study.



Do you care for someone with Dementia? Dementia can affect many aspects of language and cognition, particularly memory, which can result in frustration, burden and depression in both caregivers and people with dementia. We are currently trialing a home-based training program aimed at helping caregivers support the memory and communication of a person with dementia.

We are looking for people with dementia and their caregivers, who are living together in the community. Participation in this research includes two assessment sessions over three months. Each assessment session will involve completing a few brief questionnaires, some memory and language tasks, and two functional tasks. In addition, training using an interactive DVD-based format will be provided, which will consist of teaching the caregiver strategies that they can apply in their everyday lives.

People who live in the Greater Brisbane, Gold Coast or Sunshine Coast areas interested in participating should contact Rosemary Baker, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences at The University of Queensland on **3365 1048** or email r.baker@uq.edu.au.



Have you stopped driving? Or will you need to stop soon?

We are interested in speaking with people who have stopped driving or who will need to stop due to memory problems. The project is being run by the Division of Occupational Therapy at the University of Queensland

We would like to hear about your experiences and the experiences of your family members.

People with dementia or their family member/carers who are interested in the study can call:

Ring Sally Bennett on 3365 3004 (and leave a message if she is not available- she will ring you back) or send an email to sally.bennett@uq.edu.au

Seeking Participants for Driving Study

Are you a driver aged 65 or older?

Drivers over the age of 65 years are needed for research examining the relationship between thinking and planning and video based driver training.

Research has shown that beginner drivers benefit from some types of video based driver training. As adults over the age of 65 typically have extensive driving history, it is of interest to see which aspects of these programs are also useful for older adults.

Participation in this research involves three sessions over 4 months, conducted conveniently in your own home. Each session includes completing some brief questionnaires, simulated driving exercises on a computer and watching driver training videos such as instructional segments and footage of typical road and traffic situations.

If you are interested in participating please contact Emma-line Falconer, School of Psychology at The University of Queensland on **Ph: 0410 906 191** or **Email: e.falconer@uq.edu.au**

IMPORTANT! if you have previously participated in research at UQ which involved watching videos of traffic scenes then you are not eligible.

Help Fight Dementia

Did you know over 10 000 Queenslanders are diagnosed with dementia each year? Furthermore, over 95% of people with dementia have problems with their language? The University of Queensland Division of Speech Pathology is researching what causes language problems in dementia. We need volunteers over 55 who **do not have dementia** to help us with our research. Volunteers will be required to take part in two hours of word and picture activities either at the University of Queensland or in their own homes. Interested in doing your part to help fight dementia?

Contact **Kieran Flanagan** on 0438 165 784 or email k.flanagan@uq.edu.au



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For additional information or to be added to the AMI mailing list and Listserve, please contact us via email at ami@uq.edu.au. Alternatively you may contact Dr Nancy Pachana at School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, ST LUCIA QLD 4072 or Tel. 07-3365-6832