



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF QUEENSLAND  
AUSTRALIA

# Participant Update

A newsletter for participants in  
The University of Queensland  
School of Psychology Ageing  
Participants database

Summer 2009



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## Thank you!

Students and staff at The University of Queensland are very grateful to our community participants from the ageing participants database for their ongoing assistance with studies on issues related to older adults. Your participation ensures we maintain a high standard of research and can produce more research on ageing issues. We are particularly thankful for participants who provided the additional assistance of attending studies at our St Lucia campus.

Some of the studies conducted in 2008 included developing and validating the Geriatric Anxiety Inventory for use worldwide, assisting caregivers of persons with dementia cope with their responsibilities and increase self-care skills, examining the benefits of horticultural therapy in residential aged care facilities, and clinical drug trials for Alzheimer's disease. With your assistance, we can continue to investigate the specific issues which face older adults and aged care residents through further research in 2009.

## Are you a carer for someone with dementia?

A new correspondence-based program is being developed which may be of use to carers to identify early warning signs of low mood and anxiety and teaches new strategies for carers. Currently, a trial is being conducted.



# Ageing Mind Initiative

An exciting new development has occurred for research with older adults at The University of Queensland. This new multidisciplinary research initiative will allow for increased research on ageing issues and processes

The Ageing Mind Initiative provides a focal point for clinical, translational ageing-related research in a mental health context at The University of Queensland. The initiative seeks to build on existing strengths within the broad University community and beyond, to strengthen investigator-driven research, assist young investigators and to facilitate linkages across disciplines and to the wider community. It hopes to link with a wide array of community organisations such as Alzheimer's Australia to strengthen ageing research at The University of Queensland. It has a strong network of national and international collaborations to facilitate research on ageing.

## Aims of the Ageing Mind Initiative

A diverse array of research groups focused on clinical ageing research exist at The University of Queensland. These include researchers in psychology, psychiatry, geriatrics, occupational health, speech pathology, social work, music therapy and physical

therapy and exercise physiology. A natural link between the University's research strengths and translational research efforts is reflected in many externally-funded investigator-driven research as well as many collaborative partnerships between UQ and industry, the health sector and government.

The Ageing Mind Initiative seeks to capitalise on the potentials of a collaborative and strategic approach to clinical research on ageing, so that UQ can act as a leader in this area and help to improve assessments, interventions and ultimately quality of life for older Australians.

## Current Research Directions of the Ageing Mind Initiative

- longitudinal observational research in ageing
- investigator-initiated clinical trials using novel interventions
- large-scale population-based survey research on both healthy and clinical ageing populations
- translational research, from the lab to the clinic but also taking clinical research questions back

to the research lab

- strategic research collaborations with industry partners (e.g. Blue Care)
- fostering research development for clinician-scientists (e.g. positions for postdoctoral students)
- engaging with the community on practice and research-based initiatives
- encouraging students to explore the study of ageing as a career path

**For more information about the Ageing Mind Initiative, please visit the website:**

<http://www.uq.edu.au/sbs/ami>



# Meet the AMI Coordinators

Nancy Pachana and Gerard Byrne are experienced researchers with a strong interest in older adults.

## Nancy Pachana

Associate Professor Nancy Pachana, from the School of Psychology, is involved in a number of significant research efforts within the University of Queensland and Australia, as well as across institutions and internationally. An international perspective is an important component of Dr Pachana's research, and she is involved in long-standing collaborations with numerous Australian as well as overseas colleagues (e.g. Professor Bob Knight (the Merle H. Bensinger Professor of Gerontology at the Andrus Gerontology Center, University of Southern California; Professors Larry Thompson and Dolores Gallagher-Thompson, Stanford University).

"Maintaining strong research links internationally not only helps me with my teaching and research, but allows me to transfer international best practice and research into the

Australian context".

Dr Pachana currently is the national chair of the Australian Psychological Society's Psychology and Ageing Interest Group. This group aims to increase knowledge and training of psychologists and psychology students across Australia.

Drs Pachana and Byrne have been collaborating together for over eight years and their respective professional organisations are planning a joint conference for psychologists and psychiatrists on the Gold Coast in November 2009.

"It is good to have such a strong cross-disciplinary collaboration."



## Gerard Byrne

Associate Professor Gerard Byrne is Head of Psychiatry within the School of Medicine at The University of Queensland and Director of the Geriatric Psychiatry Service at the Royal Brisbane & Women's Hospital (RBWH). He is a visiting consultant to the multidisciplinary Memory Clinic and, with the assistance of a generous bequest, has recently established the Alzheimer's Disease Research Unit at the RBWH.

"Our work focuses on three distinct streams. The first stream involves investigating the nature of

behavioural and psychological symptoms of people with Alzheimer's Disease. This is so we can understand these better to develop better treatments."

The second stream of his research looks at the chemical messenger systems in the brains of people with Alzheimer's Disease. The third stream is conducting clinical trials of new drugs and innovative non-drug treatments for people with Alzheimer's Disease.

Dr Byrne is a past president of the Alzheimer's Association

(Queensland) and Chair-Elect of the Faculty of Psychiatry of Old Age of the Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists.

"I enjoy working with older people because in my long experience in the mental health field, working with older people is more rewarding than young. One of the main reasons for this is that older people have had a rich variety of past experiences which they can draw upon and are generally more resilient and resourceful than many younger people."



## Helping Carers Cope

Zoë Barnett, a Professional Doctorate Student in the field of Clinical Psychology and Geropsychology, has developed **The Coping With Caring Program**. The program is a correspondence based intervention for carers of older people with dementia. It aims to help carers identify early warning signs of low mood and anxiety, and to teach carers stress and coping strategies, and the importance of taking care of themselves as well as their loved ones.

The Program consists of a series of workbooks. The modules are sent to carers through the post (usually one per week).

This enables the program to accommodate carers who are unable to access face-to-face services in their communities. Workbooks are followed-up with telephone support. By undertaking the program, carers may be able to experience improvements in their mood, wellbeing, quality of life, problem solving skills and stress related to care.

Ms Barnett's project has been developed with assistance from Alzheimer's Australia (Qld) who helped Ms Barnett to develop the content for the program. Alzheimer's Australia (QLD) is keen to trial it as an adjunctive service, and if the program is proven to be successful, it may be a cost effective alternative intervention strategy appropriate for wider dissemination. For more information about the program, or the trial, please contact Zoë Barnett on 07 3719 5916 or 0417 44 77 24 or email [z.barnett@uq.edu.au](mailto:z.barnett@uq.edu.au).



## Students see the light in ageing

**In an Australian first, UQ Psychology Honours students have been able to take a course entirely focused on older adults and the issues surrounding residential aged care.**

Twenty students completed a weekly seminar course entitled "Residential Care: Positive Possibilities", which was taught by Associate Professor Nancy Pachana in Semester 2 2008. Throughout the course, students attended weekly seminars about issues affecting older adults and aged care residents. While students delivered most presentations, Associate Professor Pachana and Richard Fleming, a dementia specialist and the Director of Hammond Care, also enlightened the students with presentations.

The topics covered by the students included research on:

- Pet and Horticultural Therapies
- Dementia
- Benefits of caregiving
- Sexuality of older adults
- End of life issues
- Impact of physical environment on individual capacity
- Elder abuse
- Food issues
- Decision making regarding entering aged care
- Depression and anxiety

- Indigenous Ageing
- Aged Care in Japan
- Professional staff training
- Younger people living in aged care facilities

Students also had the opportunity to visit a residential aged care facility with Associate Professor Pachana.

The course had a profound impact on students. Preceding the commencement of the course, students were asked to write down three words describing what they thought about residential aged care. Common words were 'sad', 'lonely', and 'depressing'. Thirteen weeks later, their ideas were very different. The most frequently cited words included 'important', 'fixable', and 'hopeful'.

As the course progressed, many students expressed how worthwhile they were finding the course. For many students, this was really the first time they had thought about the issues faced by older adults and it inspired them to pursue further opportunities within the field.

Students also expressed that they had greater respect for older adults and wanted to improve conditions in aged care. The course also made them consider the ramifications for the future of their grandparents, parents and even themselves. Some suggested that all students should take the course.

Thanks to this positive response, this course will now be available in future years for more students to broaden their perspectives about older adults and to promote work within this area.



## Birdwatching: Stimulating the Brain through Nature

Birdwatching combines physical exercise, the potential for a social engagement, as well as stimulating your brain - all in one fun activity!

With the mental stimulation that birding provides from the beauty and wonder of these lovely creatures, you will enjoy a hobby that fulfills the mind, body, and spirit.

Unlike many other hobbies, you can start birdwatching right away. It's a skill that you develop and refine as you go, becoming more adept at spotting birds in their natural habitat, becoming familiar with their body shapes, unique flight patterns and songs, and their every day behaviours. Don't forget such hiking essentials as a good sunscreen, sensible shoes and water. Many birdwatchers find

wearing neutral colours in clothing makes them less visible to the local wildlife.

To get the most out of this hobby, here are a few tools you will need:

### BINOCULARS:

Look for binoculars with a magnification to enhance, not strain, your eyesight, and with comfortable lenses that rest easily against the eyes or glasses. Also note that most birdwatchers want a focus option of 10 feet or less. It might be helpful to stop by a local camera shop or sporting goods store first to examine a few pairs. An average pair of binoculars costs

around \$75, but price will vary depending on features.

### BIRD BOOK:

These run the gamut from small local field guides to large reference books. There are region-specific guides, country-based, good portable field books, and bird-specific varieties. If you're exploring fields and trails near your home, contact your local birdwatching experts through Birdwatching Australia. Go to their website:

<http://www.ausbird.com/>

## Participation Opportunities

### Age Related Differences In Association Formation

This study investigates how links between memory features are formed. Studies such as this are necessary if we are to understand how memories are formed and lost. The experiment tasks will involve numbers and words being presented on a computer screen. In addition,

participants will complete a short puzzle task. The experiment will take about 30 - 40 minutes.

Please do not participate in this study if you have already completed Kimberley McFarlane's study: ASSOCIATION FORMATION & CONSOLIDATION



If you wish to participate, please contact Kyra Hucker:

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There are several good strategies for helping to improve your memory as you get older; you can remember them as the phrase CAN DO



## You can improve your memory!

**CONCENTRATION.** Paying close attention to material to be remembered is the first important step in improving memory.

**ASSOCIATIONS.** Making connections (associations) with previous knowledge can help with memory – so try to link new things to be remembered with older information.

**NOTES.** Making a mental “note to self” is something that as people age becomes a bit erratic; a better idea is to keep written notes or lists.

**DETAILS.** Paying attention to details can help with retrieving information later on, so try to take time to focus on a few relevant details during tasks like driving a new route.

**ORGANISATION.** Try to get organised, preferably in advance of when your memory will be called upon. For example, always keep important items such as keys or reading glasses in the same place.

For any additional information, please contact:

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