



Centre on AGING

Newsletter, Vol 25, No. 2

University of Manitoba

ISSN 0826-4694 SUMMER 2007

Reflections on Aging and Contributions by Seniors

The Centre on Aging held its 24th annual Spring Research Symposium on Monday, May 7, 2007. Over 350 individuals registered for the event. The following is an excerpt from Dr. Evelyn Shapiro's presentation at the opening plenary. The full text is available on the Centre's web site: www.umanitoba.ca/centres/aging



Evelyn Shapiro, C.M., M.A., LL.D. Senior Scholar, Department of Community Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine.

In February 2007 Dr. Shapiro was appointed as a Member of the Order of Canada

What Does It Mean to be a Senior?

When I first started to reflect on what it means to me to be a senior, I was not sure on how to go about it because I suspected that each senior here would have their own unique take on it and I wasn't sure how I could say something that might be useful. I finally decided to take stock of myself for three reasons: it would be good for me, it might pique your curiosity into sizing up what being old means to you and it might encourage those of you who haven't reached old age to start a similar process in preparing to become a senior.

Overall, I thought, I'm doing pretty well for someone aged 80. Sure, I had had a broken hip that had required surgery and rehabilitation, all of which had made me feel somewhat more vulnerable. Sure I was saddled

with a few other health problems that are not uncommon at my age, the death of my husband and the relocation of my children had left me living alone after many years of having built-in companionship and ready-made helpers. Still, I was waking up each morning looking forward with anticipation to the new day. However, when I stopped to ask myself on what basis I thought I was doing well, it hit me that I couldn't answer this question without first deciding on the criteria that would help me define what the word "well" means. ...Continued p. 2

Fall 2007 Launch: Graduate Specialization in Aging

The Centre on Aging is pleased to announce the launch of the Graduate Specialization in Aging. This will allow students at either the Master's or PhD level to gain additional expertise in the field of aging and to gain official recognition by the Faculty of Graduate Studies for that expertise. Students will therefore graduate with extra credentials that, given the aging population, could be critical in finding a job.

To be recognized as having completed the Graduate Specialization in Aging, students will be required to complete two, three credit hour, core courses: "Social Aspects of Aging" (September 2007), and "Health and Aging" (January 2008) being taught by Dr. Barbara Payne. A thesis in the area of aging must be completed and at least one of the student's committee members must be a Research Affiliate of the Centre on Aging.

What Does It Mean ... (cont'd)

My research background sent me to the literature for help and I found two books that solved my problem. They had both based their studies on assessing what influences aging well and they identified six factors: staying fit, keeping intellectually stimulated, being creative, striving to remain well connected with others, caring about the welfare of others, and taking charge of one's own affairs. Yes, I thought, these are useful criteria in sizing up how I feel about being old. The job looked challenging but it got me going. So I'm now ready to share with you what I found out about myself, hoping it will encourage you to start a similar process of self-discovery and of making those changes you think desirable.

Staying Fit: I am not at all convinced, as some people seem to be, that staying fit prolongs life but I hoped it would help me stay as agile and as spry as possible. After joining an exercise class in the swimming pool, I switched to working out on the gym machines (neither of which worked for me).

“It would help me stay as agile and as spry as possible”

I finally found my niche when I joined an exercise class where I am now firmly ensconced. I like being in the company of others, I like having the leadership of an instructor, and I like the rhythmic beat provided by the music. I take pride in being able to almost keep up with most of the middle-aged participants in the class.

Intellectual Stimulation: In this regard, I think I am doing particularly well. I go to the theatre regularly and often, the quality of the performances exercises my critical faculties. My special and great passion is opera.

Reading books also gives me great pleasure. I am a dedicated “politics watcher” and the radio, TV, and the newspapers mean a lot to me. I find that age gives me a better historical and a more sophisticated perspective on events. I resent being wooed by deceptive or negative ads.

Creativity: In respect to creativity, I have always felt myself sadly wanting. To be honest, I think my situation is worse than that of almost everyone else I know. I have no apparent talent for painting or singing or writing poetry. The only saving grace I think I have is that I sometimes discover something new to explore in research but that interest now seems to me to be receding and it is clear to me that I have to start perking up and smelling the roses.

Connecting with Others: This aspect of my current life is hard for me to think about because I am at the age where I am gradually or suddenly losing dear, long-standing friends and family members. I was an only child and when I recall the hard life of my adventurous and dynamic parents who came to Canada with me when I was a young child to embark on a new and yet-unknown life here, I still feel both a sense of awe and loss. I find that the greatest distress for me at the moment is the prolonged good-bye I am experiencing in parting from an old friend with dementia whom I have known for the last sixty years. I take comfort in my children and my other friends but I am not as good at making new friends as I used to and would want to be.

Caring for Others: In addition to caring for and about the people I know and doing my bit as a volunteer, my special interest in caring for others is working with others to advance the welfare of those who are getting the short end of the stick. Both as an individual and in concert with others, I advocate for those

causes I support. I speak, I write, I march or do whatever else it takes to make my voice heard. I can tell you from my own experience that, if you haven't participated with others in a march, for example, for something you believe in, you have missed the comradeship, the shared sense of purpose and the connection you could have with people that care to make a difference.

“I advocate for those causes I support”

Taking Charge: You and I both know how important it is to take charge of yourself and your own life and you probably also know how onerous that can sometimes be. Well, I feel good that I have made out my will, my health directive, and my donation list to the institutions I value. I have even gone through and arranged my papers to relieve my children and others of that burden. As to taking charge of my daily life, I don't know whether it's a good or bad development but, in contrast to my past behaviour, I find myself somewhat less forthright in voicing my disagreement with others than in the past although I am not sure whether that is because I am less confident in my opinions or because I am more anxious to be liked.

Well, I've gone through my assessment of my current status and what it means to me to be a senior but I have also learned that I must still try to make changes that could help me do better. I am still debating with myself whether I should stick with my more modest approach in dealing with people or revert to being more certain of my opinions.

Visit our web site: www.umanitoba.ca/centres/aging for highlights from the Spring Research Symposium 2007!

Upcoming Events

Looking Back to See the Future: What Have We Learned and Where Do We Go from Here?

The Centre on Aging, University of Manitoba was **established on July 1, 1982** with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), one of five such centres in Canada and only one of two still in existence. To celebrate our **25th Anniversary**, the Centre is hosting a two-day conference on October 24 and 25, 2007, from 8:30 to 4:30 each day in the University of Manitoba's Senate Chambers, 262 Engineering & Information Technology Complex (EITC) E3.

Distinguished visitors, world renowned for their research and teaching excellence in gerontology and geriatrics will speak at this event. Each of these individuals has been either directly or indirectly involved in our Centre on Aging over the years. Three keynote lectures will be held on the 24th of October and two on the morning of the 25th. These will be followed by town hall format question and answer session on the afternoon of the 25th.

Verena Menec, PhD, Canada Research Chair (CRC) in Healthy Aging and Director, Centre on Aging, will outline why we have chosen to celebrate our successes in this way, why the five speakers were chosen, and how all of these speakers fit together. These speakers are:

Neena Chappell, PhD, CRC in Social Gerontology, and Professor, Sociology at the University of Victoria, original Director of the University of Manitoba's Centre on Aging.

Laurel Strain, PhD, Professor, Sociology at the University of Alberta and Director, University of Alberta Centre on Aging, was Director of the University of Manitoba's Centre on Aging from 1993 to 2003.

Mark Novak, PhD, Associate Vice-President, International and Extended Studies, San Jose State University, San Jose, California was Professor and Associate Dean, Continuing Education Division, University of Manitoba from 1989 to 1996.

Victor W. Marshall, PhD, is a Professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Director of the University North Carolina Institute on Aging. Prior to 1999 he directed the University of Toronto Institute for Human Development, Life Course and Aging. He is a founding member and former Vice-President of the Canadian Association on Gerontology.

Colin Powell, MD, is recognized as one of the founders of Geriatric Medicine in Canada. He joined the Department of Medicine, Seniors Health, Rockyview General Hospital, Calgary in August 2006. Previously Dr. Powell was Division Head of Geriatric Medicine at Dalhousie University and in Winnipeg.

Embracing the Challenge of Aging

The Honourable Sharon Carstairs, P.C.

Chair: Special Senate
Committee on Aging

Thursday, October 4, 2007

12:00 Noon - 1:30 p.m.

Theatre E, 780 Bannatyne Ave.

On November 7th, 2006 the Special Senate Committee on Aging was appointed to examine and report on the implications of an aging society in Canada. Issues of concern were promoting active living and well-being; housing and transportation needs; financial security and retirement; abuse and neglect; health promotion and prevention; and, health care needs. **Senator Carstairs** will discuss initial findings from the Committee's **First Interim Report** which can be found at:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/agei-e/rep-e/repintfeb07-e.pdf>

CAG 2009

The Centre on Aging is pleased to announce that the 38th annual Scientific and Educational Meeting of the **Canadian Association on Gerontology** will take place in **Winnipeg, October 22nd to 24th, 2009.**

Please mark your calendars and plan to attend!

Student Awards, 2007-2008

Each year the Centre on Aging provides awards to students who focus their studies on aging. The Centre also adjudicates applications for the Alzheimer Society. The following are the recipients of these awards.

Melissa Sitter, Master of Science student, Human Nutritional Sciences was awarded the **Centre on Aging Betty Havens Memorial Graduate Fellowship**. She is examining the effects of moving on eating habits, lifestyle changes, nutrition attitudes and nutritional status of older adults who have recently moved into a personal care home from another residence. (Advisor: Dr. C. Lengyel)

Josette Douville, PhD student in Biochemistry & Medical Genetics was awarded an **Alzheimer Society of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship** to support her research on characterizing Meox1 and Meox2 regulations of their downstream targets in vascular endothelial cells and vascular smooth muscle cells. (Advisor: Dr. J. Wiggle)

Jason Schapansky, MSc student in Pharmacology is the recipient of the **Jack MacDonell Scholarship for Research in Aging**. He is investigating secondary messengers involved in increasing intracellular calcium following long term neuregulin (NRG) signaling; how NRG-initiated calcium mobilization affects neural physiology; and if NRG can change basal calcium dynamics and neural physiology in an in-vitro Alzheimer's Disease model. (Advisor: Dr. G. Glazner)

Jonathan Thiessen, MSc student in Medical Physics also received an **Alzheimer Society of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship**. His research focus is on early diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease in APP/PSI Transgenic mice. Mr. Thiessen also was awarded an NSERC Canada Graduate Scholarship. (Advisor: Dr. M. Martin)



Left to right: Robert Tate, Community Health Sciences, Chair, Scholarship Adjudication Committee; Verena Menec, Director, Centre on Aging; Melissa Sitter; Jason Schapansky; Digvir Jayas, Associate Vice-President (Research), University of Manitoba; Sylvia Rothney, CEO, Alzheimer Society of Manitoba; and, Jim Hamilton, Executive Director, Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat.

WISER Phase III

The WISER (Wellness Institute Services Evaluation Research) Program is a longitudinal population health promotion study that commenced in January 1998. Two phases of the WISER Program have been completed. Phase I, which was carried out between 1998-2001, involved in-person interviews with members of the Wellness Institute at Seven Oaks General Hospital, Winnipeg, and community residents in Winnipeg. In Phase II of the study, previous participants were contacted a second time to monitor changes in health behaviour and health status.

Co-investigators Alexander Segall and Verena Menec are proceeding with the third phase of data collection for the WISER study. Approximately 1000 previous WISER study participants age 45 and over will be re-interviewed to collect long-term follow-up data related to health status and personal health practices over time and to learn more about the factors that contribute to healthy, active aging. In addition, Phase III will focus on neighbourhood and community-related factors and will involve an 'activity' component, in which participants may choose to wear a pedometer, a small device that measures the number of steps taken.

For additional information, contact the Project Coordinator at Dawn_Veselyuk@umanitoba.ca.

Research Affiliates Update



Benedict Albensi, PhD, Pharmacology & Therapeutics, Faculty of Medicine, Division of Neurodegenerative Disorders, St. Boniface Hospital Research Centre, and Research Affiliate, Centre on Aging received funding from the Scottish Rite Charitable Foundation of Canada to examine role of sAPP and NF-kB in Alzheimer's disease. This molecule may be important in Alzheimer's disease where patients may have a deficiency in this molecule which might lead to memory deficits.



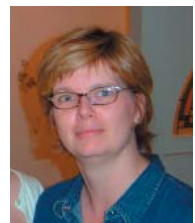
Judith Chipperfield, PhD, Principal Investigator, Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management and Research Affiliate, Centre on Aging, and co-investigators Verena Menec, PhD, Director, Centre on Aging, Barbara Payne, PhD, Research Affiliate, Centre on Aging, Raymond Perry, PhD, Psychology, and Joelle Ruthig, PhD have received funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research for a project entitled *Health, well-being, and vitality in very late life: The role of everyday physical activity and personal control*.



Daniel Sitar, PhD, Pharmacology and Therapeutics, Faculty of Medicine, Research Affiliate, Centre on Aging, was awarded the Pharmacological Society of Canada's Senior Investigator award at the Western Pharmacological Society in Banff, Alberta. He presented an award lecture entitled "*Adventures in drug disposition – Pas seulement paté du foie*", co-chaired a symposium on cardiovascular diseases in the aging patient and gave a paper entitled "*Aging issues in drug disposition and efficacy*".



Malcolm Smith, PhD, Marketing, Asper School of Business, Research Affiliate, Centre on Aging, is a co-investigator on a five year, 4.7 million dollar project entitled *Translating Research in Elder Care* funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) with PI Carole Estabrooks, University of Alberta. The research aims to examine the effect of context on knowledge sharing and use, and subsequent influence on resident health outcomes (and secondary on system and provider outcomes) in long term care facilities in the three Prairie Provinces.



In collaboration with researchers at the Centre for Families, Work and Well-being at the University of Guelph, **Bonnie Hallman**, PhD, Environment and Geography, Research Affiliate, Centre on Aging, has been involved in a study investigating patient classification systems and their impact on front-line workers in rural long-term care facilities in Ontario and Manitoba. The report to government from this project has been released and is available at: http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/pubspr/0662437721/index_e.html.

Would You Like to Participate in Research on Aging?

Women aged 70 and older who are primarily sedentary and interested in improving their mobility through exercise training are eligible to participate in a study on exercise for mobility and function in older women. Testing and training will take place in the Max Bell Centre at the University of Manitoba. In addition to two testing dates, participants will attend supervised exercise sessions twice per week for 12 weeks. All costs associated with the exercise program, parking at the University and public transportation will be covered. Contact **Dr. Michelle Porter** at 474-8795.

In her ongoing research, **Brenda Austin-Smith**, Film Studies, examines women's reactions to the "weepies", Hollywood's over-wrought melodramas produced during the 30's 40's and 50's. These movies were made specifically for female audiences. She is interviewing **women aged 60 and older** to examine the experiences of women who were moved to tears by these movies to determine why these films were so popular. To participate in this research please contact Dr. Austin-Smith at 474-9121.

The Effects of Rotation and Inversion on Face Processing in Alzheimer's Disease

How we derive a stable representation of the world despite constant changes in the visual scene is one of the crucial questions in Vision Science. Our visual system needs to generate stable representations of the objects and faces that surround us – representations that are resilient to changes in orientation and position. While this research has been well studied in healthy control subjects, how these representations are affected by neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer's disease (AD) remains unanswered.

One of the most devastating impairments associated with AD is that one day, family members and friends will no longer be recognized. We still do not understand exactly how AD affects the brain. As dementia sets in, it is characterized by memory loss, impaired judgment and decision making, and perceptual and behavioural changes. The initial stages of the perceptual loss is often overlooked because individuals in the early stages of AD can discriminate between shapes as accurately as aged matched controls (Tippett et al., 2003). When the objects are rotated to different presentation angles, however, a very different picture emerges. A recent investigation by Murphy, Kohler, Black & Evans (2000) revealed that AD impairs space and object perception and the ability to mentally rotate an object. Individuals with AD demonstrated a difficulty distinguishing between identical non-symmetrical objects when they were presented at different orientations. This deficit, commonly termed orientation agnosia can also be seen when individuals with AD are asked to replicate simple pictures. Quite often, their drawings are rotated



Jonathan Marotta, PhD
Psychology
Research Affiliate, Centre on Aging

180 or 90 degrees from the original (Caterini et al., 2002; Della Sala et al., 1995). Could this impairment in mental rotation contribute to the perceptual difficulties associated with Alzheimer's disease, and in particular their inability to recognize familiar people?

In his research Dr. Marotta investigates the sensitivity of face recognition in individuals with Alzheimer's disease. This research is not only important for our understanding of how faces are recognized but also has important implications for improved patient care, early AD detection and the development of assisted-living devices.

Caterini, F., Sala, S.D., Spinnler, H., Stangalino, C., & Turnbull, O.H. (2002). Object recognition and object orientation in Alzheimer's disease. *Neuropsychology*, 16 (2). 146-155.

Della Sala, S., Muggia, S., Spinnler, H. & Zuffi, M. (1995). Cognitive modeling of face processing: Evidence from Alzheimer patients. *Neuropsychologia*, 33,675-687.

Murphy, K.J., Kohler, S., Black, S.E., & Evans, M. (2000). Visual object perception, space perception, and visuomotor control in Alzheimer's disease. Retrieved from <http://cognet.mit.edu/library/conferences>

Tippett, L.J., Blackwood, K., Farah, M.J. (2003). Visual object and face processing in mild – to – moderate Alzheimer's disease: from segmentation to imagination. *Neuropsychologia*, 41,453-468

Canadian Association on Gerontology (CAG)

CAG is on the move! Brenda Elias has been appointed Executive Director and the CAG offices have moved to Toronto.

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CENTRE ON AGING

The Centre on Aging, established on July 1, 1982, is a university-wide research Centre with a mandate to conduct, encourage, integrate, and disseminate research on all aspects of aging.

Director: **Verena Menec**, PhD
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The Centre on Aging News is published 3 times a year and is available on our web site or by request. Direct comments and inquiries to:

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