The Prince of Wales Hospital &
The University of New South Wales

Memory and Ageing Study

Newsletter – September 2006

Some of you may have known us as the LAPSES study, but we are now known as the Memory and Ageing Study. This is a newsletter to update you on the progress of the study and advise you of some coming events. We hope that this newsletter finds you all well.

From the Project Directors

Dear Participant,

Australia is ageing. People are living longer and the proportion of the population that is older is growing year by year. Adding *years to life* is good but we all want to add *life to years*. We would all like to have a healthy older age, with our intellectual faculties intact and without being a burden on our families and friends.

This study of ***Memory and Ageing*** aims to uncover what promotes good intellectual and mental health and what may be predictive of decline in memory or other thinking abilities. Your participation and that of the person we called to ask about you are crucial to this study.

On behalf of our research team, we would like to extend our profuse thanks to you all. We appreciate your generosity with your time and your readiness to answer questions and undergo investigations. Some of the results have been useful to you and your doctors who provide your care.

The most important part of the study is the follow-up. We would like to keep contact with you annually. We will contact you by phone or mail one year after your first assessment and ask to see you for a detailed assessment one year after that, (i.e. two years after we first saw you). It is only by your continued involvement in this study that we will be able to discover what is good for ageing and identify risk factors for decline that might be preventable.

We are very appreciative of the support of the National Medical and Health Research Council who has funded this study, and that of our patron, Hazel Hawke, who courageously continues to battle Alzheimer's disease. Her story is an inspiration to researchers trying to find ways to prevent the onset of this disease and similar conditions.

Finally, let us thank all of you who have taken the time to write or call us to express your positive thoughts. Of course we welcome all types of feedback.

We look forward to seeing you at our information afternoon on Saturday 28th October, 2006 (details enclosed).

Professor Henry Brodaty

Professor Perminder Sachdev

PROJECT NEWS

Our progress to date

As of this month, September 2006, we have interviewed around 420 participants for the research project. It has now been one year since we started seeing people for the study. We have recently employed more research psychologists in order to increase the rate at which our assessments are being conducted. This August, we saw a total of 56 individuals for the study, reflecting an average of 13 new participants per week. At this rate, we hope to meet our final target of 1000 participants by August of 2007.

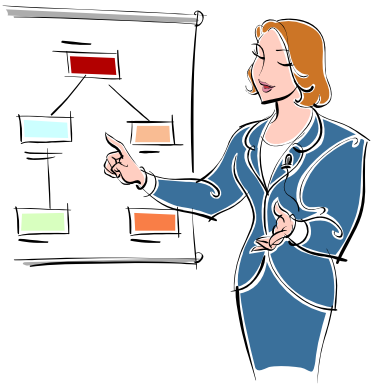
As you know, we also conduct blood tests, brain MRI scans and balance assessments as part of the research project. Thank you to everyone who has helped us by agreeing to complete these additional procedures. We are currently taking around 13 blood samples, running 6 brain scans and conducting 4 balance assessments each week. These tests will provide us with additional, and very valuable, information about the health of our participants.

The next step

Our first wave of "check-up" phone calls has started this month. We will be calling everyone approximately one year after your initial face-to-face assessment to see how you are doing, and whether there have been any significant changes in your circumstances. If you have moved, or if your contact details have changed, please call us on 9382-2704 with your new details. In addition, at the one-year mark we would once again like to make contact with your informants. This will involve completion of a brief questionnaire and an update of contact details.

Research Presentations

Dr Melissa Slavin and Ms Nicky Kochan recently presented some preliminary results from the study at the International Congress of Neuropsychiatry, Sydney, in September 2006. In addition, Dr Slavin has been awarded an International Junior Investigator Award to present study results at the 6th Annual Scientific Meeting of the International College of Geriatric Psychoneuropharmacology at Hiroshima, Japan, in October 2006. By sharing what we are learning from you with other scientists, we are contributing to knowledge on memory and ageing and hope to drive the field forward.



An Invitation to our Memory & Ageing information day

We are pleased to announce that we will soon be hosting an informal information day on Saturday, October 28, 2006. All participants and informants, as well as interested family and friends, are invited to attend and we look forward to seeing you there. This is an opportunity for you to meet the staff involved in the project as well as other participants in the study. We plan to present preliminary results from the study and will be pleased to answer any questions you may have about the project. It is also an opportunity to learn about memory problems that occur with age. Speakers will include Prof Henry Brodaty, Prof Perminder Sachdev and Dr Melissa Slavin. Afternoon tea will be provided.

Memory and Ageing Study Information Day
1:00pm – 4:00pm
Saturday, October 28, 2006
Clancy Auditorium
University of New South Wales

Brain Donation Program

Many of you have expressed interest in the ***Gift of Hope*** brain donation program, where people ask that after death their brains are donated for science. Please let us know if this interests you. There will be more about this on October 28 (details above).

Contact us

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DID YOU KNOW? RESEARCH NEWS

New in Australian research

A team at the Mental Health Research Institute of Victoria has developed a new drug shown to inhibit the formation of beta-amyloid plaques, both in mice and in healthy humans. These plaques are discrete build-ups of sticky protein that proliferate in the brains of individuals with Alzheimer's disease, damaging the brain tissue. Based on these encouraging results, a trial of the new medication is planned for patients with Alzheimer's disease.

Juice it up!

It looks like an apple a day *does* keep the doctor away. Recent animal studies at the University of Massachusetts Lowell showed that regular consumption of apple juice boosts the production of a certain neurotransmitter crucial for healthy nerve cell communication, called acetylcholine. Interestingly, many Alzheimer's drugs available on the market today were developed to do the very same thing.

Get involved and stay active

A Japanese team at Fukuoka University has demonstrated the benefits of staying active and involved as you age. They measured the cerebral blood flow of participants with early signs of cognitive impairment. There were two groups: those who exercised regularly and took part in purposeful daily activities (e.g. planning and preparing meals), versus those who did not. After a year, those in the active group demonstrated better blood flow in the areas of the brain usually low in Alzheimer's disease, suggesting that non-drug therapies based on activity and exercise may be useful in preventing or delaying the progression of the disease.

Blood sugar and the brain

Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco, have shown that chronically raised blood sugar levels in women can increase their risk of cognitive impairment or dementia. This finding is important because raised blood sugar levels can occur not only in individuals with diabetes, but also those without the disease. We also know that Type 2 diabetes is a growing problem. Control your blood sugar and stay healthy!

Caring for a loved one

Caring for a loved one in the advanced stages of an illness can be very hard for caregivers. Research at the University of Pittsburgh recently showed that prevention of depression in caregivers is important for facilitating a good emotional recovery following the death of a loved one. The key is to address depressive symptoms as early as possible and increase coping skills in order to lower the burden of care experienced by caregivers.