



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



Memory and Ageing Study

Newsletter – October 2007

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 Director

Dear Participant,

The **Memory and Ageing Study** aims to uncover what promotes good intellectual and mental health and what may be predictive of decline in memory or other thinking abilities. The study has now been running for two years.

You are one of over 1000 people aged 70-90 years who have participated along with another 1000 family or friends. About half of you also had MRI scans and half participated in a sister study of falls in older people.

On behalf of our research team, I would like to thank you very much for your generosity, your time and your readiness to answer questions and undergo investigations. We hope you have found it helpful that, where relevant, we have provided you and your doctor with feedback.

We are now arranging the follow-up assessments. These are critical if we are to discover what predicts health and decline. We are also starting the very labour intensive process of correlating your clinical information, neuropsychological data, blood tests and MRI scan results.

Analyses of data are about to start enabling some questions to be examined. For example, we found that memory complaints (and other cognitive complaints) do *not* predict poor performance on comprehensive testing but we do not yet know if they

are harbingers of decline over coming years. In other words if you are worried about your memory it does not necessarily mean you have early Alzheimer's disease, but what does it mean for the future?

We telephone you one year after your first assessment and are now arranging repeat detailed assessments which will take place about 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 funding support from the National Medical and Health Research Council and the support 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.



I look forward to seeing you at our information afternoon on Saturday 24th November, 2007 (details enclosed).

Professor Henry Brodaty

PROJECT NEWS

Our progress to date

At the end of this month, October 2007, we will have interviewed over 1000 participants for the research project.

The next step

Our first wave of follow up assessments is starting! As the study is now two years in the running, we have started our follow-up assessments of the initial 2005 participants.

The 2 year assessment will include a face-to-face interview as well as a thinking & memory assessment, and may include medical checks such as blood pressure, blood tests and MRI brain scans.



We are still calling more recent participants after one year for a phone call "check up".

If you have moved, or if your contact details have changed, please call us on 9385 9074 with your new details.

At both the 1-year and 2-year marks, we would once again like to make contact with your informants.

Website

We are now on the Internet! Our program has a website through the University of NSW Medicine Faculty where you can access information about our study, staff and progress.

www.brainage.med.unsw.edu.au

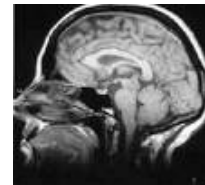


New Research

Over the last two years we have been pleased to welcome new researchers into this project.

Drs Wei Wen and Wanlin Zhu, along with Associate Professor Aihua Xia (from the University of Melbourne) are undertaking sophisticated analyses of the structural MRI scans that many of you took part in.

Nicole Kochan is examining whether functional MRI scans (which show blood flow in the brain) of participants performing memory tasks can help predict impairment in memory and other cognitive functions.



In addition, we are using an MRI technique called Diffusion Tensor Imaging, which enables the identification of microscopic changes not visible on standard MRI scans. This technique investigates certain brain areas which may be important in identifying early changes in thinking and memory.

Dr Wen, along with Dr Julian Trollor and colleagues, have been awarded a prestigious National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grant to investigate the early detection of mild cognitive impairment and dementia. This is to be done using analysis of structural MRI scans using advanced computational methods.

In other news, Nicole Kochan was recently awarded an International Junior Investigator Award and will present research from the study at a scientific conference in San Diego, USA.

An Invitation to our Brain & Ageing information day

We are pleased to announce that we will soon be hosting an information day on Saturday, November 24, 2007. Last year's information day was very well received, and all participants and informants are once again invited to attend, along with any interested family members or friends. This year, the program will cover research from the Memory & Ageing Study as well as research in related areas such as strokes, balance and falls. Speakers will include Prof Henry Brodaty, Prof Perminder Sachdev and Dr Julian Trollor. Afternoon tea will be provided.



Memory and Ageing Study Information Day

1:30pm – 4:30pm
Saturday, November 24, 2007
Clancy Auditorium
University of New South Wales



Brain Donation Program

Many of you have expressed interest in the brain donation program, where people ask that after death their brains are donated for science. We will be providing you with information about this at your 2 year assessment. Please let us know then if this is something that interests you.

Project Staff

Chief Investigators

Prof Henry Brodaty
Prof Perminder Sachdev
Prof Gavin Andrews

Associate Investigators

A/Prof Brian Draper
Dr Julian Trollor
Prof Tony Broe
Prof Stephen Lord
Dr Wei Wen

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DID YOU KNOW? RESEARCH NEWS

For Female Coffee-Lovers...

Recent research has revealed that caffeine may reduce cognitive decline in women without dementia. French researchers reported that women who drank more than 3 cups of coffee per day had less cognitive decline during 4 years of follow-up compared with those who drank a cup or less. However, no such effect was seen in men. Previous studies have suggested that caffeine, which is known to have positive effects on vigilance, attention, mood, and arousal, may also be protective of brain cells.



A Good Night's Sleep for Everyone

Night time sleep disturbances in persons with Alzheimer's disease are one of the most stressful aspects of care faced by family caregivers. Unfortunately, it is a major risk factor of institutionalised support. Better management of sleep problems is a priority in current dementia research. A study from the University of Washington has aimed to teach caregivers behavioural strategies (such as 30 mins of daily walking, increasing exposure to light and structuring daytime activities) to improve sleep hygiene in loved ones with Alzheimer's disease. Researchers hope that this will supplement drug

treatments that are already available to combat problems with sleep in persons with dementia.



Friends for Life

Studies have shown that individuals with a wide social network of family and friends are at a reduced risk of cognitive impairment. A recent report from the Rush Memory and Ageing Project in Chicago has been able to look at the neurobiology underlying this association. Might it be that having large social networks is associated with fewer pathological changes in the brain as we age? Or that it is somehow protective and reduces the effect of changes in the brain? The latter seems to be the case. Examination of brain tissue in 89 elderly individuals have revealed that even with severe pathological changes in the brain, those who had a larger social network did better on cognitive tests. These findings were robust and existed despite taking into account level of education, depression and chronic illnesses.

