



# Ageing Well

NEWSLETTER



*Bringing research to life*

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## Experts in Alzheimer's disease meet in Melbourne

NARI Director, Professor David Ames, assisted in organising a major research conference in Melbourne, attended by 200 world experts on Alzheimer's disease.

The Research and Standardisation in Alzheimer's Disease (RASAD 2012) Conference in March aimed to set common standards for research and validate imaging, biomarker and lifestyle strategies for use in Alzheimer's research centres throughout the world.

The conference, convened by the Australian Imaging, Biomarkers & Lifestyle Flagship Study of Ageing (AIBL), was attended by researchers, clinicians, and industry, regulatory and government leaders.

"Worldwide, research into Alzheimer's disease aims to improve our understanding of its causes and early diagnosis, and to develop preventive strategies," says Professor Ames, head of the AIBL study.

"For research to be effective, standardisation is essential. Researchers need to report exactly what they do so that

their colleagues in other countries are able to replicate the studies using the same methods.

"Having common standards will enable us to find answers much quicker for a disease that now affects about 280,000 people in Australia and 35 million people worldwide."

At RASAD, Professor Ames chaired a session on current issues in cognitive assessment for Alzheimer's disease and gave the conference's closing address. At a related event, he was guest speaker at the public lecture, *Consumers and researchers fighting Alzheimer's disease together*.

RASAD was supported by the CSIRO, Science and Industry Endowment Fund, Alzheimer's Association USA and the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health. ●

*\*The AIBL longitudinal study is one of the largest studies in the world using PET scans to detect the presence of amyloid beta, the protein in the brain believed to be associated with Alzheimer's disease. A key aim of the study is to discover a blood-based biomarker so a simple and effective blood test can be developed to detect the disease.*

## National approach for NARI

NARI has adopted a higher governance model by becoming a company limited by guarantee under the Commonwealth Corporations Act.

NARI is in the process of transferring its operations from incorporation to a company limited by guarantee. Under the new constitution, the Board was reduced to 11 members, all with specific portfolios.

At the Board meeting on 27 February this year, Michael Gorton AM (pictured) was elected President.

"The new model gives NARI a national presence, and requires a higher level of governance and accountability. It is important that NARI's high level of professionalism is more widely recognised," says Mr Gorton, a distinguished lawyer and principal of Russell Kennedy Solicitors.



Previously, NARI was an incorporated association under Victorian legislation. The Hon Michael MacKellar AM had been president since 2005.

"For such a relatively small research centre, NARI is an impressive institute with remarkable researchers and a fantastic reputation," says Mr Gorton.

"While NARI focuses on how research and results can be applied to improve the quality of life of older Australians, the Board's priorities are to expand NARI and ensure more organisations nationally are aware of what the Institute offers." ●

At left: The Board's immediate past president, the Hon Michael MacKellar AM (right) with Alan Castleman (Board president, 1999 - 2005) and retiring treasurer Colin Smith.



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*Thank you...*

NARI Director, Professor David Ames, thanks the retiring Board members for their commitment to the Institute. See: page 2

## Thank you...

“ I wish to thank sincerely the Hon Michael MacKellar AM for his outstanding role as NARI Board president during the past six years, a position he relinquished in February.

His characteristic enthusiasm and persuasive charm quickly dispelled my hesitancy when he approached me in 2006 about becoming NARI's Director. During our five-year working relationship, I have greatly valued his advice, inspiration and support, and appreciated his energy and commitment. I am pleased that he is staying on as a Board member.

In other Board changes, Colin Smith has stepped down as treasurer. Always a pillar of strength, he has guided NARI through some challenging times and is well respected for his acute eye in detecting an anomaly on the balance sheet. I also wish to thank Ian Allsop, Bob Solly and David Simmons for their sterling service over many years and commitment to our goals.

I am delighted that Michael Gorton AM has moved from his former role as vice-president to Board President, and I wish to welcome our new Treasurer, David Plowman.”

*Professor David Ames* NARI Director

## Four successful PhD students

*“NARI is committed to building the next generation of researchers interested in ageing, by supervising PhD students.”* Professor Stephen Gibson, NARI Deputy Director

*“NARI is a fantastic place to study. I stepped into an environment where my interest in older people and the ageing process was everyone else's interest.”* Loretta Quinn, PhD student

### Dementia and exercise

Exercise improves the balance of people with mild to moderate dementia and reduces their risk of falls.

In [Plaiwan Suttanon's](#) randomised controlled trial, people in the intervention group took part in a home-based exercise program for six months. The simple exercises, which participants did at least five times weekly, were presented in an instruction booklet, making it easy for them to follow.

A physiotherapy lecturer from Thailand, Plaiwan's research resulted in three published papers and another accepted for publication. ●

FUNDING: a scholarship from Thammasat University in Bangkok

SUPERVISORS: Professor Keith Hill (NARI/Curtin University), Professor Karen Dodd (La Trobe University) and Dr Catherine Said (The University of Melbourne)



### Music and dementia

Although music therapy had no long-term benefits for people with dementia, music therapist [Loretta Quinn](#) was aware of participants interacting and enjoying the music sessions.

Loretta created a randomised controlled trial to meet all the rigorous Cochrane music review standards.

As dementia is a disease that leads to progressive deterioration in people, she suggests it may be better to assess the benefits of music or diversional therapy programs using both qualitative data (interviews and observation) and quantitative data (formal testing). Diversional therapy includes activities like reminiscing and movement. ●

FUNDING: JO & JR Wicking Trust, and small grants from NARI and TIME for dementia

SUPERVISORS: Dr Bruce Barber (NARI) and Associate Professor Denise Grocke (The University of Melbourne)



### Reviewing care packages

Family carers acknowledged that they were receiving more services under a Federal Government home care package but most felt they needed more support.

[Kirsten Moore](#) interviewed family carers about their experiences of the Extended Aged Care at Home-Dementia (EACH-D) packages in helping them to manage a person with dementia and behavioural issues.

Carers were also concerned about the complexity and inflexibility of the system, and some queried the expertise of their case manager in helping them to deal with challenging behaviours. ●

FUNDING: one-year NARI scholarship and a scholarship from the Dementia Collaborative Research Centre (assessment and better care) at the University of NSW

SUPERVISORS: Associate Professor Elizabeth Ozanne (The University of Melbourne), Professor David Ames (NARI) and Dr Briony Dow (NARI)



### Phantom limb pain

Some amputees felt pain in their phantom limb when they saw other people in pain and phantom limb pain was also associated with memories of pains that occurred much earlier in a person's life.

These are among the many findings from [Melita Giummarra's](#) thesis on phantom limb phenomena where people still experience their limb after amputation.

Questionnaire results from 280 amputees and related studies led to Melita having 16 research papers published. ●

FUNDING: one-year NARI scholarship and a postgraduate scholarship from Monash University

SUPERVISORS: Professor Stephen Gibson (NARI), Professor John Bradshaw (Monash University), Professor Nellie Georgiou-Karistianis (Monash University) and Professor Mike Nicholls (The University of Melbourne)



## Important research review

NARI gave a detailed response to the current McKeon Review of Health and Medical Research in Australia that was commissioned by the Federal Government. The review addresses the following questions:

- Why is it in Australia's interest to have a viable, internationally competitive health and medical research sector?
- How might health and medical research be best managed and funded in Australia?
- What are the health and medical research strategic directions and priorities and how might we meet them?
- How can we optimise translation of health and medical research into better health and wellbeing?

Clearly, this review has the potential to bring major changes to medical research in Australia.

Our submission emphasised that with the ageing population and the expected investment in health and aged care services that this population will require in the future, a comparable investment to ageing research should be a priority. This is essential to help better manage the chronic diseases of ageing, develop better preventive interventions and to help older Australians to age well.

However, the current funding structures do not meet these national priority research needs. The model is unsuitable for encouraging research programs to be better coordinated, the development of a research workforce and especially for research findings to be translated into better clinical practice.

If only a tiny fraction of the health and aged care expenditure were to be devoted to research, evaluation and translating knowledge gained through these projects, this would ensure that our aged care system was of the highest quality, most cost-effective, and best suited to the needs and preferences of older Australians.

If you are interested in a copy of NARI's submission, please contact us on 8387 2305 ●

*Professor David Ames*

NARI Director

## Improving health care in Australia



Three recent research findings highlight improvements in our healthcare system, which is heartening to NARI with its focus on translating research results into practice.

Recently, I wrote in 'the conversation' website that the Federal Government's aged care reforms announced in April were steps forward because they reflected research findings that Australians prefer to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. (See: The Conversation website... [www.theconversation.edu.au/aged-care-reform-experts-respond-6576](http://www.theconversation.edu.au/aged-care-reform-experts-respond-6576))

Expanding community services for older people living with dementia should enable them to have access to services earlier in the dementia journey. This aligns with research showing that earlier access leads to better outcomes for the person with dementia and their family carer.

The second finding reflecting improvements in the Australian health system is the increased use of standardised assessment tools by community service providers, indicating the effectiveness of professional development programs. Although diagnostic tests are only one part of a health assessment, they improve the accuracy of diagnosis.

Another published paper from NARI highlighted improved media reporting about dementia.

Of course, more needs to be done to ensure excellence in providing aged care and better understanding of the issues. For instance, morale among community aged care workers can be low due to the isolation of their work and perception of low prestige work so research needs to investigate the best ways to support this group.

Also of interest is how to encourage family carers to seek assistance and also manage their expectations if they seek assistance early; the importance of early intervention is now well recognised.

Another area of concern is the way dementia and other ageing-related stories are portrayed in all areas of communication, including the media and the internet. NARI is seeking funding to enhance media understanding when reporting about dementia and the ageing process. ●

*Dr Colleen Doyle*

Director of Service Development and Evaluation

## The magic of music

People with moderate dementia discovered the magic of music when they joined a small choir for a NARI pilot study.

Preliminary results indicate that the participants enjoyed the weekly sessions and their quality of life, socialisation and sleep were enhanced. The choir was established by Annecto and conducted by music therapist Dr Loretta Quinn (pictured).

NARI has received some funding from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation to trial a similar concept; it is a pilot program involving a residential aged care facility and secondary students. ●



## NARI's e-newsletter

NARI plans to have two e-newsletters a year. Keep up with the latest NARI happenings, by emailing your contact details to: [info@nari.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:info@nari.unimelb.edu.au)

## Education news...

### NARI's successful workshops

NARI's workshops always fill fast so book early if you wish to attend any of the following sessions...

#### WORKSHOP PROGRAM - SEMESTER 2

Falls in residential aged care ..... July 11-12  
Pain in residential aged care ..... August 9  
Assessment and care planning ..... September 12-13  
Falls in the community ..... October 10-11  
Physical activity ..... November 14

### Workplace workshops

During March and April, NARI presented three workplace workshops in assessment and care planning.

For details about NARI's workshop program or workplace sessions, contact [Lynette Bon 8387 2148](mailto:Lynette.Bon@nari.unimelb.edu.au) or [l.bon@nari.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:l.bon@nari.unimelb.edu.au)

### Recognising depression

NARI will assist carers to be more aware of depression in older people, as part of an education strategy developed by *beyondblue*: the national depression initiative.

NARI was successful in becoming a licensed provider of depression recognition training in Australia to train staff working in residential aged care facilities and community facilities, using programs and resources developed by *beyondblue*. Providing the programs nationally involves NARI working in partnership with relevant organisations in other states.

### Pain in older people

More than 60 health professionals gained a better understanding about pain in older people at NARI's inaugural half-day lecture series.

Topics included assessing and treating pain, assessment tools and pharmacological approaches to pain management.

Due to the popularity and success of the session, NARI intends to present future half-day seminars.



Tai chi session at a recent NARI falls prevention workshop

## New grant

Healthy ageing is the focus of a NARI literature review to enable the Department of Health, Victoria to develop a healthy ageing plan. NARI is working on this project with the Council on the Ageing (COTA). ●

## Welcome

"It is nice to be back at NARI," says research assistant Melanie Joosten (pictured left). She did her placement at NARI last year for her Masters of Social Work.



Now, Melanie and research assistant Aurora Elmes, who has been at NARI since May, are involved in a major NHMRC-funded research project on depression. The study is assessing the effectiveness of an exercise program in improving the wellbeing of older people and their carers.

"I enjoy working in research and gaining a deeper understanding of an issue that will help to improve people's lives," says Aurora. ●

## In Singapore

Clinical psychologist Maree Daly was invited to Singapore University Hospital to share her expertise in cognitive behaviour therapy.

In May, she spent a few days working with Professor Tze Pin Ng and his research team who are interested in studying the effects of this therapy on people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). ●

Maree is the research coordinator for an Australian-first NARI study assessing the effectiveness of cognitive behaviour therapy provided over the phone to treat depression and anxiety in people with COPD.

## NARI diary

FRIDAY 7 SEPTEMBER

NARI Annual Seminar: *Mental health and ageing*

WEDNESDAY 5 DECEMBER

Volunteers 'thank you' afternoon tea