

transitions

INSTITUTE OF GERONTOLOGY

Promoting Successful Aging in Detroit and Beyond

Fall 2008

How Much Stuff Is Enough?

Downsizing: clearing the clutter, lightening the load, adjusting your possessions to fit into smaller quarters. Circumstances can force anyone at any age to downsize, but for older adults in the United States it is often a rite of passage. Some might sell the family home and move to an apartment or assisted living facility, especially after significant physical changes or loss. Some might move in with an adult child. Despite the frequency of downsizing among older adults, from a research perspective there is much to learn.

"Downsizing is not well understood," said Dr. Cathy Lysack, co-principal investigator (PI) of a new research study into how individuals make household moves later in life. "How do people think about this transition and plan for it? Is it stressful or are they happy to be unburdened, liberated? We hope to reveal the psychology and behavior of the process."

Dr. Lysack joins co-PI Dr. Mark Luborsky in overseeing the three-year project. Similar research is being conducted simultaneously at the University of Kansas with Dr. David Ekerdt as PI. The two sites share the

\$918,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health and will compare research participants from different backgrounds. The Detroit site will give a snapshot of how urban Americans downsize. The Kansas site will draw from a suburban population. Each site will recruit equal numbers of African Americans and Caucasians.

"We want to learn about how decisions are made about what to keep, discard, give away or sell," Dr. Luborsky explained. "A deeper understanding of this process could help caregivers, family members, assisted living centers and even real estate agents provide better support to older adults during the transition."

The Downsizing Project research team is recruiting participants who are 65 years or older, have moved recently or plan to move within a year. The study requires at least one interview in your home of approximately one hour. A small fee is paid on completion. Please call 313-577-2297 to learn more about participating.

"This project is significant scientifically because it will test our theory about how adults creatively manage loss and continuity in later life."

- Mark Luborsky, Ph.D.



The 2008 **Healthier Black Elders Reception** was a rousing success, providing 1,250 older adults with screenings, information, music, exercise and motivational tips to stay healthy. Dr. Olivia Washington greets a caregiver in her 70's who brought her mother (seated) to benefit from the days activities.

research
education
outreach
partnerships



Training the Brain to Resist Aging's Effects

Deep within the offices of the IOG, a dedicated team of five well-dressed women trains a constant stream of older research volunteers to improve thinking, memory and problem solving. The



ACTIVE project, which stands for Advanced Cognitive Training in Vital Elders, recently received \$632,000 from the National Institutes of Health to fund a 10-year follow-up to the

original ACTIVE research, done in part at the IOG.

Principal investigators Dr. Michael Marsiske (now at the University of Florida, but an IOG faculty member at the start of the original project and currently an adjunct faculty member) and Dr. Peter Lichtenberg are trying to determine if the improvements in mental functioning found in the first study are long-lasting. The original clinical trial, from 1999-2001, as well as the current follow-up study, was conducted at six institutions around the country. The trial tested the effects of

three cognitive training approaches, each focused on memory, reasoning, or processing speed.

Over 2,800 adults took part in the original study, which showed that training *can* improve the cognitive performance of older adults. Evidence of some improvement on challenging tasks of daily living and in performing mentally demanding daily activities was also noted.

"The current project," explained Dr. Marsiske, "permits us to examine whether mental training effects remain detectable up to 10 years after the initial training. We will also investigate whether we continue to see promising findings on functional tasks of daily living. We are interested in knowing, for example, whether the rates of age-related change are different for people who received training."

June Clark, a member of the IOG's Board of Visitors, has worked on the ACTIVE study from the beginning. Initially she served as a participant recruiter and trainer. Since 2003, she has functioned as the study coordinator — and also as its heart and soul. "ACTIVE has real-world value," June said. "I like knowing that I'm making a positive difference in people's lives."

The CENTURY PROJECT: Endowing Research for a New Era

Research is the backbone of the IOG; it gives form and support to everything we do. Our Institute is home to some of the nation's most respected and prolific researchers in aging. Changes in brain structure and function; mood disorders such as depression, memory problems and Alzheimer's; disability and rehabilitation; health inequalities between ethnic groups — these are just a few of the areas our dedicated faculty investigate. Without research projects and the talent to lead them, there is no IOG.

So it is with excitement and hope that we launch The Century Project, a research endowment fund to insure a continuous stream of funding to keep our research alive and thriving. While the IOG has been fortunate to receive large grants from venerable government institutions such as the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute on Aging, these sources of funding are never guaranteed. As federal budgets tighten so do research dollars.

An IOG research endowment fund, created through the generous donations of all who believe in healthy aging, is a reliable source of long-term support. Every dollar donated to The Century Project will be spent on research, either to spur new ideas or to perpetuate and expand existing studies.

A steering committee is currently being formed to guide these new fund-raising efforts. To become one of The Century Project's charter donors, through immediate or planned giving, please contact IOG Development Officer Terri Bailey at 313-577-9048.

AWARDS & PUBLICATIONS

Dr. Peter Lichtenberg received the 2008 Advocacy Award from *Adult Well-Being Services* for his efforts promoting the rights and concerns of older adults and the mentally ill.



Drs. Olivia Washington and Cathy Lysack



each received special recognition and honors at the 75th anniversary of the Women of Wayne Alumni Association for having achieved tenure after receiving a Women of Wayne Research Grant.

The IOG's Fall Poster Session displayed the research of 19 pre-doctoral students, most of them enrolled in the IOG's training program. A panel of expert judges named three prize winners: 1st place to **Brooke**



Schneider for her work on depression in older black adults; 2nd place to **Cheryl Dahle** for research involving working memory, hypertension and navigation ability; and 3rd place to **Stacey Schepens** for her study of dynamic tests to predict balance



confidence in older adults. "The posters and the research supporting them were of extremely high quality this year," said Dr. Lysack who oversees the training program. "Choosing only three winners must have been extremely difficult."

Dr. Hector Gonzalez and IOG pre-doctoral



student **Wassim Tarraf** were among the authors of "Anti-depressant Use in Black and White Populations in the United States," published in the October issue of *Psychiatric Services* journal.

International Flair Fills the IOG

The international community was well-represented recently when two pre-doctoral students traveled thousands of miles to work with IOG research faculty. Saartje Burgmans, 27, came to Wayne State from The Netherlands in August of 2008 to work in cognitive neuroscience with Dr. Naftali Raz for four months. Katerina Machacova, also 27, sought an internship at the IOG after learning her husband's employer was transferring him from the Czech Republic to Detroit for 18 months. She works with Drs. Mark Luborsky, Cathy Lysack and Tom Jankowski analyzing data she collected in the Czech Republic and writing her dissertation before returning home next June.

Kate's research focuses on the most effective way to determine functional fitness in older adults. Functional fitness is not about marathon running, but rather how a person independently performs basic daily activities. This is her second trip to the U.S. "During my last visit, the tragedy of 911 occurred," Kate said. "And during this visit, the financial crisis has hit throughout the world. Awful. My friends tell me not to visit again."

The Czech Republic encourages and supports doctoral students who study abroad to gain international experience. "We are lucky that this worked out well for my husband and

me," she said. "I learn a great deal from the faculty members I work with." She and her husband have traveled to Niagara Falls, Toronto, New York, L.A and San Diego. Last summer they took a six-day bike trip through Michigan. Future plans include D.C., Chicago and a trip to the national parks out west

Saartje made this first trip to the U.S. on her own but immediately felt welcomed. "Dr. Raz picked me up from the airport," she said, "and introduced me to the campus area." Earlier in the year, she had asked Dr. Raz about ways to work with his lab, then wrote a research proposal based on his suggestions. "I

wanted to learn from Dr. Raz' experience. He is a big name in the field," she said.

Maastricht University funded the visit that allows Saartje to analyze brain image data here and to write a paper for publication. She travels through the U.S. as time permits. She's seen Chicago and plans to visit New York, D.C., Baltimore and Boston. Americans have been overwhelmingly friendly, but she struggles with one cultural anomaly. "People don't seem to cook much here, at least on campus," she noted. "There are four stoves in my building, and only one works properly. I must be the only one who uses it."



Clockwise from left: Saartje's home city of Maastricht; Kate visits with grandparents in Prague; Saartje (in green sweater at extreme left) bonds with colleagues at Maastricht University.



PARTNERSHIP CORNER

Prevent Illness with Health Screenings

Quality Home Health Care Services of Michigan (QHHC) now provide free, ongoing health screenings in Detroit's Northwest Activities Center at 18100 Meyers Rd., Detroit, MI 48235. These convenient, free services encourage Detroit's older adults to take a more active role in their health. QHHC also provides complimentary progress charts so patients can track test results and share them with their personal physicians. During the month of November, free glucometers will be provided with each diabetes screening.

The high incidence of hypertension and diabetes in older African-American and Latino adults is well-documented and can have devastating results. The IOG appreciates the opportunity to partner with local businesses that are equally committed to correcting health disparities in our community. By working together, we will make a healthy difference.



SAVE THE DATE! OPEN TO THE PUBLIC (free unless otherwise noted)

NOVEMBER 18 (9 am - 3 pm)

Memory Screening Day

Arden Courts, 24005 W. 13 Mile Road, Bingham Farms, 48025

Free evaluation of memory changes (normal or a cause for concern?) by IOG Director Dr. Peter Lichtenberg. Call 248-644-8100 or visit binghamfarms@arden-court.com for details.

NOVEMBER 21 (11:30 am – 1 pm)

Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Drugs, Alcohol and Addictions but Were Afraid to Ask

River Towers Retirement Community, 7800 E. Jefferson Avenue, Detroit 48214
Lower Level Community Room. Free lunch provided.

DECEMBER 1

Deadline for creative submissions for the March 26 **Art of Aging Successfully Conference**. Art of Aging displays non-professional writings, music and art works in all mediums from persons 55 years and older. Call Donna at 313-577-2297 or visit www.iog.wayne.edu for an application form.

DECEMBER 11 (10-11:30 am)

Healthcare Consumer Learning Series, Especially for Latino Americans

LA SED Senior Center, 7150 Vernor Hwy., Detroit 48209

Free blood pressure and glucose screening. Feb., Mar. and Apr. Learning Series details available after Jan. 1 by calling Pat at 313-577-2297.

JANUARY 25, 2009 (10 – 11 am)

Effects of Stress on the Aging Brain

Presenter and IOG Researcher Dr. Scott Moffat
LongAcre House, Farmington Hills 48336
Refreshments

FEBRUARY 25 (10 – 11 am)

Getting Around Town: Staying Mobile as We Age

Presenter and IOG Researcher Dr. Cathy Lysack
LongAcre House, Farmington Hills 48336
Refreshments

MARCH 26 (9 am – 2 pm)

Art of Aging Successfully Conference, "Revitalize, Rejuvenate, Refresh"

Greater Grace Temple in Detroit
Fee of \$18 includes lunch

JUNE 2 (10 am – 2:15 pm)

Healthier Black Elders Health Reception

Bert's Warehouse Theater
Historic Eastern Market, Detroit 48207
Free pre-registration required.

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