

transitions

INSTITUTE OF GERONTOLOGY

Promoting Successful Aging in Detroit and Beyond

Fall 2007

IOG Researcher Receives \$1.46 Million to Study Stress and the Aging Brain

Scott Moffat, Ph.D., got the \$1.46 million greenlight from the National Institute on Aging to study how chronic exposure to stress hormones affects the brain's structure and function. The grant, "Cognitive and Neural Consequences of Long-term Cortisol Exposure in Human Aging," spans four years and is a major accomplishment during this period of serious cuts in government funding for research.

The stress hormone cortisol is produced by the adrenal glands to help the body survive short-term physical or mental stresses. Cortisol functions well as a short-term strategy by increasing heart rate, focusing attention, and

releasing energy. But when cortisol is released over long periods of months or years, the organs are overtaxed and damage may ensue. Animal studies have shown that high levels of stress-related hormones released over long periods of time decreased the size of the brain's hippocampus, an area crucial for memory.

"We know that cortisol attacks certain brain regions and causes some atrophy and loss of brain function," said Dr. Moffat, who is an assistant professor in the IOG's Cognitive Neuroscience and Aging department and in Wayne State's Department of Psychology. "In humans, we think exposure to stress and high levels of cortisol may cause memory loss and ultimately increase the risk for dementia."

Dr. Moffat's research will test the impact of cortisol on the structure of the brain and related cognitive functioning. Does long-term cortisol exposure shrink structures in the brain or de-

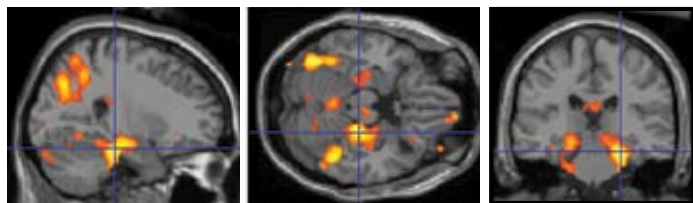


Dr. Moffat



HBEC provided approximately 100 free cholesterol screenings at its HBEC Health Reception in June.

research
education
outreach
partnerships



Magnetic resonance images show which areas of the brain function during cognitive tasks

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IOG Ambassador Visits Congressmen in D.C.

June Clark, a long-time IOG board member, volunteer and ambassador, made a surprise trip to Washington, D.C., in November to try to stop funding cuts slated for supplemental programs



June Clark

to Medicare. June met with four Michigan politicians to describe her medical situation and how the supplemental programs benefitted her health and her finances. June has diabetes and suffered a serious cancer scare a few years ago but her supplemental program helped considerably by reducing co-pays and

providing quality education to help her manage her diabetes.

"I especially like HAP's (Health Alliance Plan) new Health Track program," June said. "I signed up for it last week and already have a nurse assigned to my case. I can call her anytime with questions or concerns at no charge." June explained that with doctors' time at a premium, many seniors aren't able to ask the questions in the doctor's office that worry them. Having a nurse "on call" solves that problem. The assigned nurse will be knowledgeable about their roster of patients, responsive by phone or e-mail, and not as rushed for time.

June also talked to the three congressmen and a senator about the six-week educational program HAP provided when she was diagnosed

with diabetes. "I learned about diet and exercise. They helped me take my blood sugar levels. I got tips for keeping track of medications and what info to carry in my purse," she said. "The panic I felt over the diabetes gradually went away."

The bill being proposed would cut funding to senior-oriented educational and preventive programs offered by insurance companies like HAP, which could force their elimination. "The people I met with listened well to what we had to say," June said. "We need to put a personal face on these spending cuts."

If June looks familiar, you may have seen her in the current HAP commercial, chosen because she has been an active subscriber to HAP insurance for many years and embraces prevention to improve her health.

Workshops About Aging Issues Expand Throughout Metro Detroit

This year, the IOG Learning Series is heading into suburbia to reach seniors living in West Bloomfield, Oak Park, Grosse Pointe Woods and Southfield. This expansion of the popular program is thanks to new partnerships with the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit and with St. John's Hospital.

ElderLink, a Jewish Federation program, will host two sessions of the series in December, one in West Bloomfield and the other in Oak Park. CareLink Senior Program, through St. John's, will host two additional sessions of the series between April and September of 2008.

Every Learning Series session is free and open to seniors, caregivers and professionals working with seniors. Program details are listed at right, but series' rosters include several expert professionals in topics of interest to seniors, such as mental health, finances, legal planning, and physical fitness. Every series allows time for questions and interactive discussion and provides refreshments. The Learning Series format allows the IOG to expand its outreach mission by connecting new audiences with valuable aging information.



LEARNING SERIES SCHEDULE

Wednesday, Dec. 5, 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

West Bloomfield (call 248-661-1000 for location)

Everything Old Is New Again

Peter Lichtenberg, Ph.D., Director, Institute of Gerontology

Common Mistakes in Senior Investing

Jeffrey Smith, Financial Analyst, Woodworth Financial

Everything You've Ever Wanted to Know about Long-Term Care But Were Afraid to Ask

Danielle Mayoras, Attorney, Center for Elder Law

Wednesday, Dec. 12, 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

Oak Park (call 248-967-4030 for location)

Staying Mentally Fit and Healthy in Your Later Years

Peter Lichtenberg, Ph.D., Director, Institute of Gerontology

It's Not All about the Nursing Home: Legal Planning after 70

Jim Schuster, Attorney, Elder Law

Generating Income in Retirement

Timothy Wyman and Sandra Adams, Certified Financial Planners, Center for Financial Planning

Friday, April 18, 2008

Van Eslander Cancer Center, St. John's Hospital Grosse Point Woods

Call 888-751-5465 for time and topics.

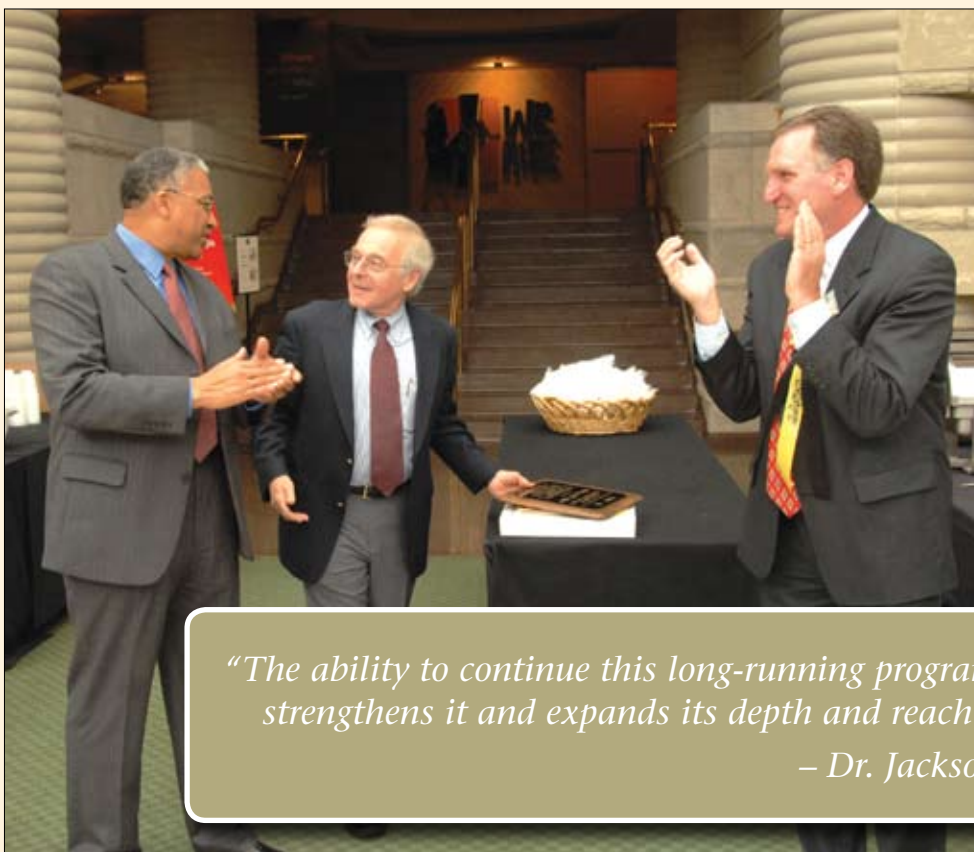
outreach

\$3.3 Million Grant Continues African American Research

The National Institute on Aging approved an additional five years of funding for the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research, jointly run by the University of Michigan and the IOG. The center, with the unusual acronym MCUAAAR, is tasked with improving the health of older, urban African Americans through a combination of public education, scholarly training, and research.

This marks MCUAAAR's 11th year in existence and the beginning of its third cycle of funding. The center will have been continuously funded by the government for 15 years, a highly unusual accomplishment and a testament to its relevance and success. "Our objective is to develop a new generation of scholars in social and behavioral science research. We train scholars devoted to improving the health of older ethnic and racial minorities," said James Jackson, Ph.D. of the U-M, who co-directs the center with the IOG's Peter Lichtenberg, Ph.D.. "The ability to continue this long-running program strengthens it and expands its depth and reach."

In addition to educating minority scholars to work with an aging population, the grant funds the Healthier Black Elders Center housed at the IOG. The HBEC organizes a series of community health forums each year, the annual health reception (nearly 1,000 persons attended in 2007), and recruits members for the participant resource pool with a current roster of 738 seniors willing to participate in research projects.



Dr. Jackson (left) and Dr. Lichtenberg (right) honor NIA Branch Chief Sidney Stahl at the 2007 HBEC reception. Dr. Stahl strongly supports the work of the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research at U-M and IOG.

"The ability to continue this long-running program strengthens it and expands its depth and reach."

– Dr. Jackson



Olivia Washington, Ph.D., heads the HBEC. "The goal is to make a significant difference in the health of all African Americans," she said, "by reversing current healthcare inequalities. This grant will allow us to touch an additional five to six thousand people. That's a remarkable impact."

IOG Director Dr. Lichtenberg was grateful to

the NIA for recognizing the importance of MCUAAAR to the future of aging and health. "Funding isn't *granted*," Dr. Lichtenberg said. "It must be earned. We train scholars, bring key health information to thousands of seniors, and research how African Americans can stay healthier as they age.

"This generous grant is money well spent."

IOG Researcher Gets \$1.46 Million to Study Stress and the Aging Brain

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crease blood flow? Does it increase the risk for dementia or general cognitive decline as we age, even diminishing our ability to follow directions and find our way?

The research team will have access to urine samples from over 7,000 patients spanning 30 years. From these samples, they will determine levels of cortisol and compare them with the results of cognitive testing and diagnoses of dementia. Some research participants will also undergo MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and PET (positron emission tomography) to measure brain structures.

"Dr. Moffat's continued research in this area is critical for understanding the conditions under which cognition deteriorates, especially in the cases of Alzheimer's disease and dementia," said Dr. Hilary Ratner, Vice President for Research at Wayne State. "These diseases devastate the lives of so many. Dr. Moffat's innovative work will contribute significantly to finally reaching a solution."

Prior to this grant, the NIA had funded a three-year research project lead by Dr. Moffat into the effects of the sex hormone testosterone on the brain of the aging male. Results pointed to low levels of testosterone in mid-life predicting an increased risk of Alzheimer's in late-life.

The Challenge of Explaining Complex Research on Aging

If you've ever wondered what's new in the field of aging, a research poster session is the place to satisfy your curiosity. At the IOG's fall event held on campus at the end of October, 16 students displayed the details of their current research projects on large easy-to-read posters filled with graphs, photos, charts and written explanations.

The students – tomorrow's leaders in gerontology – used their posters as a touchpoint to guide the nearly 100 visitors through the research and answer questions. This "research with a personal touch" forces students to translate their work into concepts the public can understand. "Everyone benefits from these kinds of interactions," said Dr. Lichtenberg. "Students learn presentation

skills. Visitors glimpse the inner workings of research and the important issues of the future. We must continuously bring research concepts to the public so they see the value of education and funding."

This year's topics included brain changes as we age, personality disorders in the elderly, chemotherapy and memory skills, and the health of older Mexican Americans. All posters were professionally judged by a team of three faculty members for a monetary award. Tom Jankowski, Ph.D., one of the judges and the IOG's associate director of research, said the quality of the posters presented by the predoctoral trainees and postdoctoral research fellows was exceptional.

"Every poster in the exhibition was professional, well-executed, and based on interesting and important research," he said. "The presenters did an outstanding job." The winners, all pre-doctoral trainees, were:

1st Place: Andrew R. Bender (experimental psychology), for his poster, "Effects of Age on the P3 Component in ERPs to a Cross-Modal Recognition Memory Task." P3 is a brain waveform detectable by EEG.

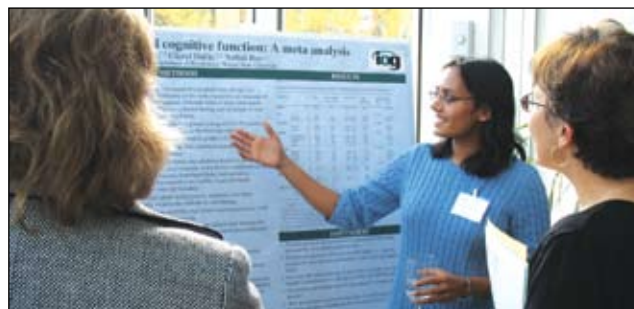
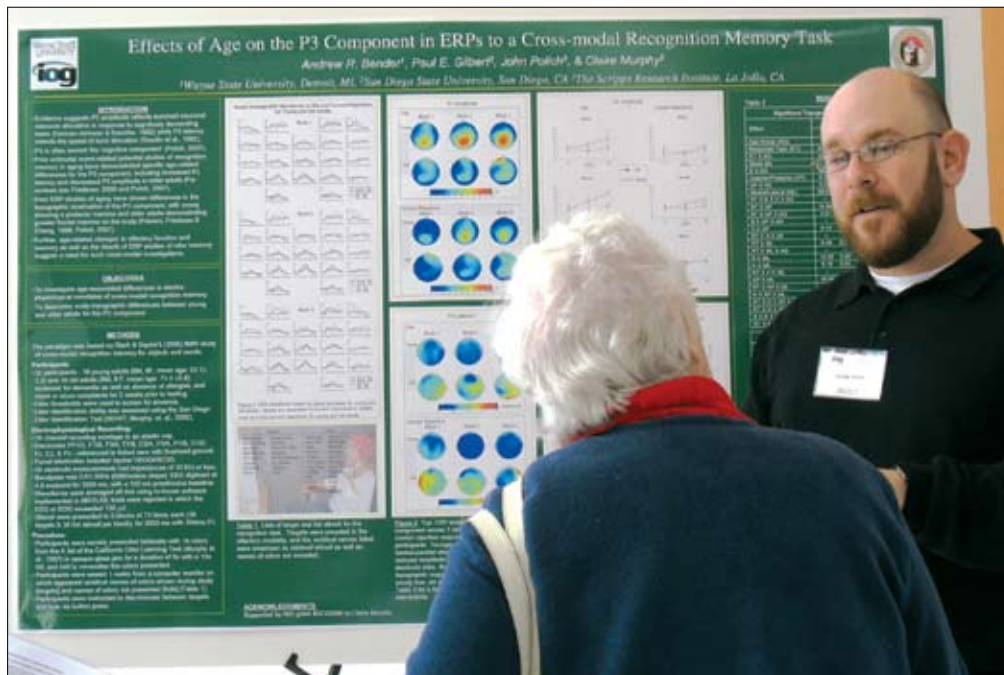
2nd Place: Stacey Schepens (physical therapy), for her poster, "Is the Short Version of the Activities-Specific Balance Confidence Scale a Valid Measure of Balance Confidence, and is it Related to Balance Impairment and Falls in Older Adults?"

3rd Place: Awantika Deshmukh (cognitive neuroscience), for her poster, "Homocysteine and General Cognitive Function: A Meta-Analysis." Homocysteine is an amino acid that has been related to a higher risk of heart disease and stroke.

The IOG congratulates all students who displayed posters at this event. Most of these students will next present their research at the Gerontological Society of America annual meeting in mid-November.

Clockwise from top:
1st Place winner
 Andrew Bender,
2nd Place winner
 Stacey Schepens,
3rd Place winner
 Awantika Deshmukh,
 pre-doctoral trainee
 Edmundo Reyes
 shakes hands with
 IOG professor
 Naftali Raz.

photos by
 Cheryl Deep



TIPS AND TOPICS FOR CREATIVE AGING

Clear your calendar for Thursday, March 27, 2008, to attend the *Empowering Choices for Living Well* conference at Greater Grace Conference Center (23500 W. 7 Mile Rd.) from 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. *Empowering Choices* is the 9th annual Art of Aging event presented by the IOG, a chance for seniors to display their art work and attend workshops on nutrition, fitness and creative pursuits. This year's keynote speaker will be Sonny Eliot, Detroit's beloved TV personality and weatherman for half a century.

To purchase tickets or get more information, contact Donna MacDonald at 313-577-2297 or donna.macdonald@wayne.edu. Tickets sell out early every year, so don't delay. Continental breakfast and a hot lunch are included in the \$20 ticket price.

The quilt shown below is entitled "Mathis May" by Julie Ann Baker of Detroit and was displayed at the 2006 Art of Aging event.



Congratulations to the IOG's First Faculty Fellow in Aging and Lifespan

Heather Dillaway, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of sociology at Wayne State University and has received the IOG's first fellowship for Advanced Study in Aging and Lifespan. Dr. Dillaway's areas of interest include aging; sex and gender; women's reproductive health; the intersections of gender, race, class and other inequalities; and the body. Her latest research involves the qualitative study of women's experiences of menopause, "When Does Menopause Occur and How Long Does It Last?" She is also assisting in research into how African American men learn about and participate in research trials on prostate cancer.

The fellowship, created in conjunction with the Office of the Vice President of Research, is a three-year pilot program that grants \$25,000 each year to the selected fellow. Dr. Dillaway will occupy an office at the IOG at least half-time and be integrated into the IOG faculty for two consecutive semesters. During this time, she will engage in a self-defined program of intensive research related to aging; give at least one, one-hour presentation for the IOG colloquia series; and participate in monthly IOG faculty meetings.



President Reid honors Dr. Dillaway.

"It is an honor and a delight to be able to work closely with Dr. Dillaway," said Dr. Lichtenberg. "Her areas of research meld so smoothly with those of the IOG." Dr. Dillaway's reputation for high achievement also extends to teaching. She won the 2007 President's Award for Excellence in Teaching, conferred by Wayne State University President Irving Reid.

PARTNERSHIP CORNER

IOG Hits the Air Waves Again!

Thanks to the support of our new partner Wright & Filippis, the IOG's Dr. Lichtenberg is back on the air! Beginning this September, Dr. Lichtenberg is the guest speaker on *Aging Well* a program broadcast twice a month on WNZK 690 AM.

This program is a special feature on "Ask Your Neighbor," hosted by Bob Allison daily between 9:00 – 11:00 a.m. Allison, a 45-year veteran of radio, has a strong following of seniors in the Detroit metropolitan community and provides information and entertainment on a broad array of topics.

During the *Aging Well* broadcast, Dr. Lichtenberg will discuss issues such as caregiving, exercise, mental health, chronic disease, respite care and the current research that is moving us all in positive directions. The program allows for call-in questions from listeners (dial 248-557-3300) and is broadcast every other Thursday from 10:30-11:00 a.m.



SAVE THE DATE!

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Community Health Forums

All health forums are free, open to the public and provide refreshments. Health forums are presented by the Healthier Black Elders Center for research into aging.

Thursday, February 14, 2008, 10–11:30 am

Mercy Stapleton Center
9341 Agnes, Detroit, MI 48214

Topics: *Seniors and Blood Cancers* by Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren* by Dr. Ramaswamy, *Heart Smart* by Health Alliance Plan (HAP)

Thursday, March 13, 2008, 10–11:30 am

Northwest Activity Center
18100 Meyers Road, Detroit, MI 48235

Topics: *Promoting Health and Well Being* by Dr. Harvey, Univ. of Illinois, *Beyond Lung Cancer:*

Tobacco and Our Health by Karmanos Cancer Institute.

Thursday, April 17, 2008, 10–11:30 am

Friendship Meadows Apartments
3930 Rivard Avenue, Detroit, MI 48207

Topics: *Prostate Cancer* by Dr. Willie Underwood, M.D., of Wayne's School of Medicine
How to Power Sit by Ernie Clark, owner of Ex-Coach Potatoes Fitness Center

Art of Aging Successfully Conference

Thursday, March 27, 2008, 9 am–2:00 pm

Greater Grace Conference Center
23500 W. 7 Mile Road, Detroit, MI 48219

Creative artworks by non-professional senior artists, a keynote speech by beloved Detroit weatherman Sonny Eliot, plus interactive workshops on art, fitness and nutrition all mark this fun-filled day that ends with a hot lunch and lots of socializing. Call or e-mail Donna at the IOG for

a registration form: 313-577-2297 or ba8841@wayne.edu. Registration fee is required.

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

The IOG Colloquium Series

Colloquia lectures and discussions are free and open to students, professionals and the public. They take place in the 2nd floor Hoobler Room in the Charles Freer House next door to the IOG at 71 E. Ferry Street, Detroit, 48202.

Tuesday, November 27, 2007, 9:30–10:30 am

Depression among Older Adults Accessing Aging Services by Thomas Richardson, Ph.D., M.B.A., University of Rochester

Tuesday, December 4, 2007, 9:30–10:30 am

Symptoms and Physical Activity among Older Adults with Osteoarthritis by Susan Murphy, Sc.D., University of Michigan

Writing/Editing - **CHERYL DEEP** • Graphic Design - **CATHERINE BLASIO** • Photography - **RICK BIELACZYC**



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