

# ERA Times

The newsletter of the Emerging Researchers in Ageing Initiative, Australia ([www.era.edu.au](http://www.era.edu.au))

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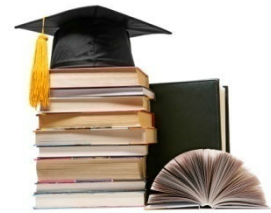
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## Research Reflections

Dr Ralph Hampson, Monash University & Jewish Care, Victoria, shares with us his experience of completing his PhD:

I was fortunate enough to attend the early ERA conferences in 2002 and 2004. It was so inspiring to meet other researchers who were working on ageing issues. I remember the passion and energy in the room, at both conferences, and being inspired by Professor Helen Bartlett and her colleagues at The University of Queensland. It was good to have the opportunity to share my experiences with peers who were on a similar journey.



So I thought it might be useful to reflect on what it feels like to finish, and why it is worth completing the journey, at least from my point of view. My research undertaken at The University of Melbourne focused on the impact of the built environment on people (without dementia) who lived in residential aged care facilities, and it was completed over 7 years (part time).

There was a cumbersome ethics process (which I presented at the ERA conference in 2004) which reinforced for me how there can be fear about doing research with older people in residential care – they were typically seen as patients - not residents – who were vulnerable and needed protection. Yet the joy in working with the residents was that nothing could have been further from the truth, they were articulate, engaged and wanted to have a say in the design of their homes. Those who participated talked about how good it was to have the opportunity to have a say, to be asked for their views. This is what inspired me to continue with the research, even when the going got tough, that older people, especially those who are labeled 'vulnerable' are often spoken about, rather than being spoken to.

Completing the PhD was a great feeling – for me and my family. I am pleased to report 6 months later (after reading a lot of novels!) that I do believe the process of undertaking the research has placed me in a stronger position to talk about the issues of the built environment and older people, because I am now recognised as an expert in my field of research – which I guess is the purpose of the PhD. This was hard to imagine in the early stages when I presented at those early ERA conferences - when I felt like I didn't have a strong enough focus, a clear enough question, and that it might all be too hard. But the 'proof is in the pudding' as they say and now being on the 'other side' I wanted to share that it seems that it has been a very worthwhile journey.

[Ralph's PhD is available through ARROW – the digital thesis repository.]

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## ERA Virtual Seminar Series

The ERA Virtual Seminar Series has continued to draw attendees from all over Australia in 2009. We started the year with Professor Peter Saunders from the Social Policy Research Centre at UNSW presenting on the Interface Between Research and Policy in March. This was followed in April by a presentation on Understanding your Intellectual Property in Ageing Research from Mr Brad Thomas, Partner, Innovation Law, and Ms Sharon York, UniQuest. In June, we were delighted to see the first international virtual link happen with ERA students in the UK joining us from Cardiff University, Wales. For this landmark seminar, Professor Helen Bartlett, Monash University, and Professor Judith Phillips, Swansea University, each presented their perspective on Developing and Maintaining International Collaborations. The next virtual seminar is scheduled for the 3<sup>rd</sup> August, and Professor Julie Byles from Newcastle University will present on Fostering multidisciplinary research. For a preview of the rest of the year, please visit the ERA website – [www.era.edu.au](http://www.era.edu.au) – where the remaining virtual seminars are listed on the home page and under “Events”.



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## ERA 2009 Conference + Workshop

The 2009 ERA Conference to be held at Rydges, Melbourne, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October, is shaping up to be the biggest ever, with almost 100 presentations and posters from postgraduate students in ageing research around the country. The grant-writing workshop on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> October is now fully subscribed, but a waiting list is being kept, so if you are yet to register for the conference, you can still tick the appropriate box on the registration form and your name will be added to the wait list for the workshop. Note that earlybird registration closed on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July. Queries about the conference should go to [era2009.sphc@med.monash.edu.au](mailto:era2009.sphc@med.monash.edu.au), and please visit the conference website for other information: <http://www.med.monash.edu/sphc/haru/conference09>.

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## The ERA Website ([www.era.edu.au](http://www.era.edu.au))



When I first thought that the thing that was needed next in ERA was a website with an interactive, user-driven section, I had no idea what was really involved in designing and setting up such a beast ('beast' being the operative word). I know now! We began this project in earnest in March 2009, and over the intervening months we have gradually put together what I think is a user-friendly, informative and useful tool to facilitate ongoing communication and collaboration among all the people connected to ERA. The final phase, the registered users' section, finally went live on the 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2009.

The website includes public information pages with news items, events, the Monday List, a history of ERA, and a whole raft of resources in ageing research. Then there is the registered users' section, in which there is a discussion forum, where you can post topics or news items so that others may join in a discussion about these. A noticeboard provides a space for you to post information about events, seminars, conferences, or maybe links to useful websites or publications. And there is a careers board where you can upload any job vacancies you have or know of, and these can be accessed, sorted and searched by people who might be interested. The whole registered users' section is designed to be user-driven, so while a lot of the information and notices in there at the moment have come from me, I hope that that will change over time and that other people will start to use these tools as a matter of course.

If you are not already registered, it is free and you can register yourself easily by filling in a simple online form on the website.

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## Spotlight on research initiatives in ageing

### Healthy Ageing Research Unit (HARU), Monash University

The Healthy Ageing Research Unit (HARU), directed by Professor Colette Browning and housed within the School of Primary Health Care at Monash University, was established in September 2006. HARU's mission is to conduct research of the highest international standards that is designed to improve quality of life for older people while recognising the dynamic and diverse nature of the ageing population in the community.

HARU is home to several major research programs including the Melbourne Longitudinal Studies on Healthy Ageing (MELSHA) program which is jointly run by Monash and the University of Sydney. This year MELSHA will gather information about participants' mental agility and examine how it influences healthy ageing. The Cultural Conceptualisations of Ageing Program (CCAP) is our second major program and is investigating the conceptualisations of healthy and successful ageing across different cultures, and how these conceptualisations impact health behaviours and use of health services. CCAP currently has data collections in Australia, Malaysia and China.

Other ongoing projects at HARU include evidence-based care of people with dementia led by the Australasian Cochrane Centre, healthy ageing in older veterans, challenges of accessing food by older people, inter-agency partnerships in the multicultural community sector, and the use of research-based theatre as a health promotion strategy.

The team at HARU works with a range of organisations including Local and State Governments, peak body and community based organisations. Working in partnership in this way increases the relevance of our research and the potential to directly influence policy and practice to actually make a difference to the lives of older people.

HARU also runs ongoing seminar programs and in 2010 will be contributing to the Masters in Health Sciences program. And finally, in October of this year, HARU is delighted to be hosting the 8<sup>th</sup> National Emerging Researchers in Ageing Conference, which is the first time it has come to Melbourne. For more information please go to our website (<http://www.med.monash.edu.au/sphc/haru/index.html>) or contact Harriet Radermacher (03 9501 2435 or [harriet.radermacher@med.monash.edu.au](mailto:harriet.radermacher@med.monash.edu.au)).

### Ageing Mind Initiative, University of Queensland

The Ageing Mind Initiative, or AMI, is a new clinical ageing research group at the University of Queensland coordinated by Associate Professor Nancy Pachana from the School of Psychology in the SBS Faculty, and Associate Professor Gerard Byrne from Psychiatry in the Faculty of Health Sciences. This initiative includes researchers from various Faculties and disciplines within UQ, as well as from other Australian Universities and international collaborators.

AMI seeks to provide a focal point for clinical, translational ageing-related research in a mental health context at the University of Queensland. The Initiative seeks to strengthen investigator-driven research agendas, assist early career researchers in ageing and facilitate linkages across disciplines and to the wider community.

There are increasing funding and research opportunities in the field of ageing as governments and universities recognise the significance of demographic shifts towards an ageing population in Australia and beyond. We at AMI are excited to be working with a number of research groups on clinical initiatives on a variety of topics, including residential aged care (with Blue Care), improving hospital care for patients with dementia (within Queensland Health) and improving assessment of financial capacity (with the Queensland Office of the Adult Guardian). AMI also coordinates information about the Geriatric Anxiety Inventory, an assessment tool developed specifically for older adults by Associate Professors Pachana and Byrne.

There are interesting resources and links available to early career researchers on the AMI website, available at [www.uq.edu.au/ami](http://www.uq.edu.au/ami).

## The Healthy Ageing Research Cluster (HARC), University of Adelaide

The Healthy Ageing Research Cluster (HARC), based at the University of Adelaide, has been pleased to continue its support of Australian Society for Medical Research (ASMR) with sponsorship for the Adelaide ASMR Scientific Meeting held 2nd June 2009. The HARC-sponsored Healthy Ageing session comprised six presentations of a very high standard on the following topics:

- The role of certain genes as potential diagnostic and therapeutic targets in osteoarthritis
- The systemic involvement of bone in the pathogenesis of osteoarthritis
- The effects of glucose load on blood pressure, heart rate and splanchnic blood flow in healthy elderly
- The effects of alpha-cyclodextrin on blood pressure, gastric emptying and glycaemia in the elderly
- Fructose malabsorption in infants and toddlers with gastrointestinal symptoms
- The relationship between weight status and sleep duration in adolescents on school and non-school days

The prize for the best oral presentation was shared by:

- Dr Diana Gentilcore, Discipline of Medicine, University of Adelaide: Effects of alpha-cyclodextrin on blood pressure, gastric emptying and glycaemia in the elderly
- Ms Hilary Jones, Sansom Institute, UniSA: Fructose malabsorption in infants and toddlers with gastrointestinal symptoms

The prize for the best poster presentation was awarded to:

- Ms Nga Lam, Hanson Institute and School of Molecular and Biomedical Science, University of Adelaide: Osteoblast-specific VDR over-expression protects against bone loss due to Vitamin D-deficiency in a transgenic mouse model

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## Students' News and Views



A quick look at what emerging researchers in ageing around the country have been up to in recent times....

### Theses Submitted

[Felicity Barr](#), University of Sydney, submitted her thesis entitled *Connections and disconnections: A qualitative study of the social capital of older Australians in a coastal resort* on the 24<sup>th</sup> June, and then she hopped on a plane to Paris for the IAGG World Congress!

[Margaret Simmons](#), Monash University, submitted her thesis in June, entitled *Leaving homes, locating selves: Stories of women evacuated as children in WWII Britain who immigrated to Australia in the postwar period*.

### PhDs Granted

Just to reinforce that there is an end to this journey, [Nadeeka Dissanayaka](#), University of Queensland; [Joanne Dollard](#), University of Adelaide; and [Donna Pinsker](#), School of Psychology, University of Queensland, have all been granted their PhDs. Congratulations!

### Funding Received

[Christina Aggar](#), University of Sydney, received a Travelling Fellowship from the Faculty of Medicine, University of Sydney, to attend the IAGG Conference in Paris in July 2009 where she presented a poster.

[Ariane Laplante-Levesque](#), University of Queensland, has been awarded the 2009 Academy of Rehabilitative Audiology Herbert J. Oyer Student Research Award. See [www.audrehab.org/oyer.htm](http://www.audrehab.org/oyer.htm) for more information.

[Carolina Weller](#), Monash University, has been awarded \$20,000 by the Nurses Memorial Centre and Australian Legion of Ex-Service men and women.

## Papers Published

Nadeeka Dissanayaka, University of Queensland, has been busy on the publishing trail:

Dissanayaka, N.N., Silburn, P.A., O'Sullivan, J.D., & Mellick, G.D. (2009). Serotonin and dopamine transporter genes do not influence depression in Parkinson's disease. *Movement Disorders*, 15(1), 111-115.

Dissanayaka, N.N., Sellbach, A., Matheson, S., Marsh, R., Silburn, P.A., O'Sullivan, J.D., Byrne, G.J., & Mellick, G.D. (2007). Validity of Hamilton Depression Inventory in Parkinson's disease. *Movement Disorders*, 22(3), 399-403.

Dianne Goeman and colleagues have published the following paper:

Goeman, D., Sancu, L., Scharf, S., Bailey, M., O'Hehir, R., Jenkins, C., & Douglass, J. (2009). Improving general practice consultations for older people with asthma: A cluster randomised control trial. *MJA*, 191: 113-117.

Nathan O'Callaghan, CSIRO, has published an interesting paper:

O'Callaghan, N.J., Clifton, P.M., Noakes, M., & Fenech, M. (2009). Weight loss in obese men is associated with increased telomere length and decreased abasic sites in rectal mucosa. *Rejuvenation Research*, 12(3), 169-176.

Maria O'Reilly, Queensland University of Technology (QUT) published the following paper, and also presented it as a poster at the IAGG 2009 in Paris:

O'Reilly, M., Courtney, M., Edwards, H., & Hassall, S. (2009). Assessing quality in Australian residential care made easy: The ResCareQA. *Journal of Nutrition, Health & Aging*, 13(S1), S467

Carolina Weller, Monash University, has also been busy in the publications arena:

Weller, C. (2009). Interactive dressings and their role in moist wound healing (chapter 4) in *Advanced Textiles for Wound Care*. Woodhead Publishing Limited, Cambridge UK, 97-113.

Weller, C. (2009). A simple guide to randomised control trials in wound care. *European Wound Management Association Journal*, June.

## Conference Presentations

Susan Hunt, Monash University, recently presented at the General Practice and Primary Health Care Conference, Melbourne (15-17 July).

Physical activity recommendations for older Australians. [Jane Sims (Healthy Ageing Research Unit, Monash University), Keith Hill (National Ageing Research Institute), Sue Hunt (Healthy Ageing Research Unit, Monash University), Betty Haralambous (National Ageing Research Institute)].

Details and PowerPoints : [www.phcris.org.au/elib/lib/elib/viewabstract.php?elibid=6639](http://www.phcris.org.au/elib/lib/elib/viewabstract.php?elibid=6639)

Joanne Rowley, Southern Cross University, won first prize for her poster titled Aged Care Nurses Use of Reflective Drawing to Depict Issues in Delivering End of Life Care at the St Francis Hospice 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Kaleidoscope International Palliative Care Conference in Dublin, Ireland.

Sze-Ee Soh, University of Melbourne, presented at the Movement Disorders Society 13<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorders in Paris, France:

Soh, S., McGinley, J., Menz, H.B., Watts, J., Iansek, R., Murphy, A.T., Morris, M.E. (2009). Health-related quality of life in Australians with Parkinson's Disease.

Carolina Weller, Monash University, presented the paper:

Weller, C., McNeil, J., Evans, S., Reid, C. (2009). Can the CONSORT statement improve healing in the elderly? At the conference, "Nursing and the future: Celebrating research in nursing and midwifery", held at Monash University, Melbourne on the 9<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

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CONGRATULATIONS to all of these ERAs on their successes!