



ARC/NHMRC Research  
Network in Ageing Well

# The ERA Times

The Newsletter for Emerging Researchers in Ageing  
Issue 2, November 2008



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF QUEENSLAND

Welcome to the second issue of the ERA Times, a newsletter for emerging researchers in ageing. We hope that this newsletter will help to keep you up to date with details about events and information relevant to ageing research. The newsletter is your forum, so keep us informed with your news and views in the world of ageing research —tell us what you're doing, what you think and what you wish. Tell us about success stories and lessons learnt; if you've submitted or graduated, had your research published, been awarded a grant, presented at a conference, published in the media etc etc!

## From the ERA office...

First, I would like to welcome Melissa Williams to the ERA team. Melissa will be helping me develop and co-ordinate all of the ERA activities in 2009. For those who are a little confused about how ERA works these days... Although she has moved to Monash University, Helen Bartlett continues as the national Convenor for the ERA initiative under the Network, and the initiative continues to be co-ordinated from the offices of the Australasian Centre on Ageing (ACA), now part of the Institute of Social Science Research (ISSR) at the University of Queensland (UQ). I think that sentence needed a few more anagrams to give it sufficient gravitas. This arrangement will continue until the end of 2009 and as co-ordinator of the national ERA activities, I am pleased to say there is a very full schedule of events to look forward to next year.

In 2008, we had a number of successful 'firsts' for Emerging Researchers in Ageing in Australia – the inaugural Masterclass in March was hailed a great success; the first ERA national video seminar was held in September and a second in November, with both receiving extremely positive feedback from participants; and the first national and international exchange programmes were also launched this year, with partial funding being awarded to Ashleigh Smith from the University of Adelaide. Ashleigh undertook an exchange with the Institute of Neurology, University College, London, as part of her investigation into the ageing related differences in preparation time for movement when young (18-25yo) and elderly individuals (65+) are compared. The main aim of Ashleigh's work is to consider whether changes in the preparation of movement could underlie some of the known age related declines in movement in the elderly. With the funding she received from her university and from the Network, Ashleigh was able to work closely with leaders in this field of research in London. In addition, the Network provided funding for ten bursaries for postgraduate students to attend the 2008 ERA Conference in Fremantle.

The success of these activities will be followed with the second Masterclass in February 2009; a planned expansion of the video seminar series across 2009 (including an international seminar between Australia and the UK); and applications have opened for the second round of funding for the exchange programmes. In addition to these, we are working on a variety of ideas – many of which come from the students involved in ERA - to further promote and increase networking and collaboration amongst emerging researchers in ageing across Australia. So 2009 is shaping up to be another good year for ERA and I'll look forward to announcing details of various events as they unfold.

Linda

## ERA Video Seminar Series

Following the success of the first two ERA video seminars – the first held on the 15<sup>th</sup> September and the second on the 5<sup>th</sup> November – we are in the throes of planning the 2009 programme. It is expected that we will run 8 video seminars between March and December 2009. These will cover a variety of topics and feature a variety of presenters. One particularly exciting outcome from this year's ERA conference is the co-ordination of a joint UK-Australian video seminar, which will most likely take place in June 2009. Discussions are well underway with Judith Phillips from Swansea University and OPAN (Older People & Ageing Research & Development Network) about setting up this international video seminar. Details next year!

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## ERA Exchange Program 2009

Applications are now open for funding of national and international exchanges for 2009. To be eligible to apply you must meet the following criteria:

- You must be currently and actively enrolled in a PhD/PD programme at an Australian university;
- You must have completed at least one year full-time equivalent of your PhD/PD programme as at the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009



- Your research must be strongly focused on issues concerning human ageing; and
- You must not have submitted your thesis or be within 3 months of submission.
- You must have a paper accepted for, and present at, an international conference.

Funding is being offered up to \$5000 for a national exchange and up to \$10000 for an international exchange. The deadline for applications is Friday 27th February 2009 with funding allocated by the 31st March 2009. All funding must be used before the 1st December, 2009. To apply, go to the following weblink:

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/?p=WEB228D28SP89F>.

Not sure how to start with setting up your exchange?

Judith Phillips from Swansea University in Wales is very active in developing an ERA initiative in the UK and she would be delighted if Australian students who are interested in doing an exchange in the UK would contact her in the first instance for advice and assistance on setting up their exchange programmes. You can contact Judith initially by email on [Judith.e.phillips@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:Judith.e.phillips@swansea.ac.uk). Please direct any more general enquiries about the exchange programme to Linda Peach on [L.Peach@uq.edu.au](mailto:L.Peach@uq.edu.au).

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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....



How can carers of people with dementia, and older people in general, be confident that a hospital is prepared to provide suitable care for people with dementia? This is a source of considerable anxiety for carers. In seeking to answer this question, Melinda Martin-Khan, a PhD student with the Academic Unit in Geriatric Medicine (AUGM), has been awarded a Viertel Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship in Dementia through Alzheimer's Australia for her project 'An Accreditation and Quality Framework for Dementia Care in Acute Hospitals'. The initial concept of the project arose during discussion with the Research Workgroup of the Queensland Statewide Dementia Clinical Network. The project will commence in 2009 and aims to provide a system for measuring a hospital's 'readiness' to provide quality care for patients with dementia.

This system will assist hospitals to improve their assessment and management of patients with dementia or delirium. Professor Len Gray, along with Melinda, Associate Professors Gerard Byrne and Nancy Pachana and several international collaborators, have secured further funding for this work through a successful grant application to the J.O. and J.R. Wicking Trust.

Dr Jackie Perkins, PhD candidate at the Faculty of Natural Resources, Agriculture and Veterinary Science, University of Queensland, is planning to submit her thesis in December 2008 (go, Jackie!). Jackie's literature review has been published and can be found at: Perkins, J. Bartlett, H. Travers, C. Rand, J. (2008) Dog Therapy for People with Dementia: a randomised controlled trial and development of an evidence-based protocol. *Australasian Journal on Ageing*, 27 (4), 177-182.

Claire Thompson, PhD candidate, School of Psychology, University of New South Wales has received an AAR Dementia Research Grant (Psychosocial Research). Her research is titled "A longitudinal study of Prospective Memory in Mild Cognitive Impairment and Dementia".

Edmund Talob, a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney, presented preliminary outcomes of his recent project entitled "Predictors of Graceful Ageing in Senior Australians". Results of his study were highlighted in a poster presentation at the Faculty of Health Research Conference held at the York Fairmont Resort in Leura, NSW on the 11th-12th November 2008. The conference, "From Cell to Society 6 (FCTS6)", was sponsored by The University of Sydney Health Faculties of Dentistry, Health Sciences, Medicine Nursing & Midwifery, and Pharmacy.

Jane Palmer, PhD candidate from the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology, Sydney, has won a 2009 Endeavour Fellowship to pursue fieldwork in Aceh as part of her PhD study.

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## Later Life Learning: this could be the start of something big! (Cappy Engelbrecht)



The prospect of reaching a long and healthy life is a real possibility for most of us. It is therefore very likely that during our later years we will be challenged to learn something new. It might be acquiring information about a health innovation, or adoption of technology such as an electronic ticketing system, or perhaps even training for a new career after retirement. But who has the skills underpinning an effective learning experience for Australian seniors? This is an important question, because it introduces into traditional adult learning concepts the consideration of biopsychosocial issues relevant to later life learning. Older adult learners are unique; they arrive at the learning event having accumulated enormous prior knowledge and experiences, possess different cultural and social beliefs, and some might even have had negative learning or educational experiences. In addition, personal priorities change as we age; and issues such as spirituality, self-identity, personal control, relationships and even citizenship become more important to older adult learners as they confront issues including impending mortality and physical decline.

Current research into dementia is showing that cognitive exercises can in fact help offset symptoms of decline, and there is enormous excitement about neuronal regeneration and brain plasticity. Sometime in the next 20 years, it will be possible to use microchips embedded in our brains - or "smart" drugs - to stimulate our cognitive performance, improve our memory function and enable us to process information at a rapid pace – irrespective of our chronological age. While this is a marvellous thought, it further raises the important question of how we might adequately develop later life learning theory today as we prepare for those older tomorrow. Studying this question is the focus of educational gerontology, a multidisciplinary field that sits across adult education and training, social gerontology, cognition and instruction – for the benefit of the older adult.

Research investigating whether Australian Universities were adequately preparing future adult educators for an ageing population offered disconcerting results: there is a paucity of evidence of an adequate preparation of future (and incumbent) adult educators to cater to a changing demographic, and no evidence of ageing educational research collaborations to further this specialised field. Clearly there is a need for Australian universities to place more emphasis on developing adult educators to cater to the needs of the ageing population.

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## ERA 2008 Conference

(Andrea Petriwskyj & Linda Peach)

On Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> November, over 70 students, academics, practitioners and policy makers in ageing attended the 7th Emerging Researchers in Ageing Conference in Fremantle, Western Australia. The annual one-day ERA Conference is convened by the ARC/ NHMRC Research Network's ERA Initiative as part of their program of events designed to build research capacity among students in ageing. The conference provides an important opportunity for Masters, Professional Doctorate and PhD students to showcase their work and make links with other students and professionals in ageing, and is always a popular and successful event. The 2008 conference was no exception, with around 30 students presenting their research on a wide range of topics including aged care, policy, dementia, exercise, and volunteering. For the first four years of its existence, the ERA Conference was held in Brisbane, after which it began to travel. It was hosted by the University of Sydney in 2006, and the University of Adelaide in 2007. This year, the conference was organised by Curtin University's Centre for Research on Ageing, led by Professor Barbara Horner. Barbara and her committee did a great job of organising the conference and the feedback from all participants was very positive.

In line with the ERA ethos of promoting and building research networks and collaboration both nationally and internationally, this year's conference featured a keynote address by Professor Judith Phillips from Swansea University in the UK. Judith's visit was sponsored by Curtin University Centre for Research on Ageing, the ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well and the Australian Association of Gerontology. Judith spoke on the topic, Shaping Research Landscapes. Gerontological research in a new era: A view from the UK. Key messages in Judith's address were that ageing is gaining importance as a policy and research area across the UK and that opportunities for emerging and early career researchers are opening up more rapidly and with more funding support than ever before.

The 2008 ERA Conference was a resounding success and thank you to everyone who helped to organise it, and to the Gold Sponsor, the Office for an Ageing Australia, Department of Health and Ageing. Thank you also to all of the presenters, and we will look forward to seeing many of you again at the 2009 ERA Conference on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> October in Melbourne.

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## ERA Network Welcomes Honours Students

As you may already know the goal of the ERA initiative is to help postgraduate students who are doing research into ageing at Australian universities to develop and strengthen networks of emerging researchers, foster collaborative research projects, provide forums for mentoring and discussion, to disseminate relevant information and to organise and co-ordinate workshops and masterclasses that will assist ERAs to develop their future careers in ageing research.

We are now looking to extend the ERA network to include honors students whose research projects are related to issues around human ageing. We hope that by providing networking opportunities to students when they first enter the field of ageing research, we may help to nurture their interest in the field and ultimately encourage them to continue their careers in ageing. As a first step in this process, we would appreciate your help in identifying students whose honours projects in 2009 will be related to ageing research. If you know of any honours students who will be undertaking research in ageing in 2009, we would be delighted if you would kindly put them in touch with Melissa Williams at [m.williams@psy.uq.edu.au](mailto:m.williams@psy.uq.edu.au).

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