

ST VINCENT'S CURRAN FOUNDATION 20TH SPRING RECEPTION

**TRIVETT
ALEXANDRIA, SYDNEY**

SEPTEMBER 26, 2013

**ITA BUTTROSE, AO OBE
NATIONAL PRESIDENT, ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA**

I AM DELIGHTED TO HAVE BEEN ASKED TO SPEAK AT THIS SPECIAL ST VINCENT'S CURRAN FOUNDATION 2013 SPRING RECEPTION, CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF THE FOUNDATION.

AS A FOUNDATION MEMBER AND ALSO THANKS TO TRISH BURNS, A FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE FOUNDATION – I THINK FOR SOMETHING LIKE 17 YEARS – I AM WELL AWARE OF THE IMPORTANT WORK THE FOUNDATION DOES IN RAISING FUNDS TO SUPPORT PATIENT CARE, CLINICAL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH FOR ST VINCENT'S HOSPITAL. TRISH AND I MET WHEN WE WERE ABOUT 8 AND BECAME NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOURS; WE'VE BEEN FRIENDS EVERY SINCE.

TRISH KNEW MY FATHER, CHARLES, WHO HAD VASCULAR DEMENTIA, THE SECOND MOST COMMON DEMENTIA AFTER ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE. IT WAS BECAUSE OF DAD THAT I BECAME INVOLVED THE WORK OF ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA.

AND I SINCERELY WANT TO THANK THE FOUNDATION FOR THE CONTRIBUTION OF \$3000 IT HAS MADE FOR THE ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA DEMENTIA RESEARCH FOUNDATION. WE ARE MOST GRATEFUL.

AT LAST YEAR'S SPRING RECEPTION I KNOW YOU WERE PRIVILEGED TO HEAR FROM PROFESSOR BRUCE BREW, HEAD OF NEUROLOGY AT ST VINCENT'S HOSPITAL, WHO TOLD YOU ABOUT THE REMARKABLE RESEARCH BEING CONDUCTED INTO THE CAUSE AND TREATMENT OF DEMENTIA.

AND IT IS REMARKABLE BUT FOR THIS VALUABLE RESEARCH TO CONTINUE, FURTHER INVESTMENT IN DEMENTIA RESEARCH IS NEEDED. WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO FIND OUT WHAT CAUSES DEMENTIA AND WHY AND HOW IT AFFECTS THE BRAIN IN THE WAY THAT IT DOES.

AS SOME OF YOU MAY8 HAVE NOTICED FROM THE MANY BANNERS IN SYDNEY'S CBD, LAST WEEK WAS DEMENTIA AWARENESS WEEK WITH THE THEME, *BRAIN HEALTH: MAKING THE CONNECTIONS.*

OUR AIM IS TO GET AUSTRALIANS TO UNDERSTAND THAT BY LIVING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE AND REMAINING BOTH PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY ACTIVE THEY MAY LOWER THEIR RISK OF GETTING ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND OTHER DEMENTIAS.

MANY PEOPLE STILL MISTAKENLY BELIEVE DEMENTIA IS A NORMAL PART OF AGEING. IT ISN'T. DEMENTIA IS A CHRONIC DISEASE THAT NOW AFFECTS MORE THAN 320,000 AUSTRALIANS.

EVENTS LIKE DEMENTIA AWARENESS WEEK GIVE US AN OPPORTUNITY TO TALK ABOUT NEW AND MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDES TO AGEING IN GENERAL AND DEMENTIA IN PARTICULAR.

GIVEN MY LONG HELD PASSION AS AN ADVOCATE FOR PREVENTIVE HEALTH STRATEGIES, I LOVE LEARNING SOMETHING NEW ALMOST EVERYDAY ABOUT THE POTENTIAL OF POSITIVE AGEING.

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BEING A JOURNALIST... I AM BY PROFESSION A JOURNALIST, AS I'M SURE MANY OF YOU KNOW... THERE ARE MANY CHALLENGES, SOME OF THEM A LITTLE DAUNTING, IN SEEKING TO INFORM THE PUBLIC ABOUT PREVENTIVE HEALTH, AND EVEN MORE IN CHANGING ATTITUDES.

JUST RECENTLY A STORY THAT ILLUSTRATES MY SENSE OF EXCITEMENT WELL, CAUGHT MY ATTENTION.

IT WAS A REPORT ABOUT TWO STUDIES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND DENMARK SUGGESTING THERE MAY BE SOME GOOD NEWS IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST DEMENTIA... GIVEN THAT THERE HAVE BEEN NO NEW DRUG TREATMENTS SUCCESSFULLY DEVELOPED IN THE LAST 10 YEARS...ANY GOOD NEWS IS ENCOURAGING.

THESE PARTICULAR STUDIES CHALLENGE THE ASSUMPTION THAT PREVALENCE RATES OF DEMENTIA ARE CONSTANT ACROSS GENERATIONS AND THAT THE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA ARE SIMPLY A FUNCTION OF THE NUMBER OF OLDER PEOPLE IN THE POPULATION.

BOTH STUDIES FOUND THAT FOR A GIVEN POPULATION COHORT, THE RISK OF DEVELOPING DEMENTIA MIGHT ACTUALLY DECREASE.

IN ENGLAND AND WALES, DEMENTIA RATES OVER THE TWO LAST DECADES WERE SHOWN TO HAVE DROPPED BY 24 PER CENT AMONG THOSE 65 AND OLDER.

IN DENMARK THE PERCENTAGE OF THOSE AGED OVER 90 WHOSE COGNITIVE ABILITIES WERE SEVERELY IMPAIRED ALSO DROPPED BETWEEN 1998 AND 2010.

THE REACTION OF SOME ALZHEIMER'S ORGANISATIONS AROUND THE WORLD WAS TO EXPRESS DOUBT ABOUT THE RESEARCH – A POINT OF VIEW THAT SOME JOURNALISTS WERE UNKIND ENOUGH TO REGARD AS SELF INTERESTED.

ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA TAKES THE VIEW THAT THE RESEARCH IS UNQUALIFIED GOOD NEWS AND FURTHER EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE DEMENTIA RISK REDUCTION MEASURES WHICH WE'VE BEEN ADVOCATING FOR MANY YEARS.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE ARGUMENT OF COURSE IS THAT ALTHOUGH THE RISK OF DEMENTIA FOR ANY POPULATION MAY DECLINE OVER TIME – AND EVEN THAT MAY BE UNCERTAIN – THE TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA WILL CONTINUE TO RISE BECAUSE OF THE AGEING POPULATION.

BUT WHAT WE NOW KNOW IS THAT SUCCESSIVE GENERATIONS OR EVEN SLIGHTLY YOUNGER COHORTS SEPARATED BY AS LITTLE AS 10 YEARS MIGHT NOT HAVE THE SAME RISK.

IT'S A WONDERFUL THOUGHT THAT OUR GRANDCHILDREN MAY BE LESS LIKELY TO DEVELOP DEMENTIA THAN WE ARE.

THE STUDIES I'VE TALKED ABOUT ARE OBSERVATIONAL STUDIES AND NOT RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIALS SO THEY DON'T TELL US A LOT ABOUT THE CAUSES.

IN THEIR INTERPRETATION THE AUTHORS OF THE UK STUDY SAID: “THE SCALE OF REDUCTION THAT WE IDENTIFIED IS SUBSTANTIAL AND IN LINE WITH MAJOR REDUCTIONS IN RISK FACTORS IN HIGHER INCOME COUNTRIES, WHICH HAVE BEEN MODIFIED BY SOCIETAL CHANGES SUCH AS IMPROVEMENTS IN EDUCATION AND PREVENTION, AND TREATMENT STRATEGIES IN RECENT DECADES”.

THEY GO ON TO MAKE AN OBSERVATION THAT IS OF GREAT INTEREST TO ALL OF US AT ALZHEIMER’S AUSTRALIA...THAT “ALTHOUGH MAJOR FACTORS COULD HAVE INCREASED DEMENTIA, PREVALENCE AT SPECIFIC AGES – SUCH AS THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH DIABETES, SURVIVAL AFTER STROKES AND VASCULAR INCIDENTS – OTHER FACTORS THAT COULD DECREASE PREVALENCE, SUCH AS IMPROVED PREVENTION OF VASCULAR MORBIDITY AND HIGHER LEVELS OF EDUCATION SEEM TO HAVE A GREATER EFFECT.”

NATURALLY THERE IS THE INEVITABLE CAVEAT ABOUT THE NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH BUT THE UK AND DENMARK STUDIES DO OFFER AN ENCOURAGING GLIMMER OF HOPE. ALZHEIMER’S AUSTRALIA SEES INVESTMENT IN STUDIES INTO DEMENTIA PREVALENCE AS A VITAL PART OF THE GREATER INVESTMENT THAT IS NEEDED IN DEMENTIA RESEARCH.

WE DO NEED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT INCIDENCE AND THE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA TO PLAN SERVICES; CURRENTLY AUSTRALIA RELIES ON OVERSEAS DATA. WE BELIEVE THE TIME HAS COME TO RECTIFY THIS SITUATION.

WE HAVE PUT TOGETHER A PROPOSAL FOR AN AUSTRALIAN DEMENTIA PREVALENCE STUDY THAT WOULD LINK OTHER POPULATION STUDIES AND GIVE US DATA FOR THE FIRST TIME ON AUSTRALIAN DEMENTIA PREVALENCE. IT IS A COSTLY EXERCISE – \$10 MILLION AND WE WILL BE DISCUSSING THIS SHORTLY WITH THE NEW FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

WHEN IT COMES TO PREVENTIVE HEALTH WE NEED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE FACTORS THAT ARE IMPORTANT IN PROTECTING THE BRAIN AGAINST DEMENTIA AND THE IMPACT THAT THESE FACTORS ARE HAVING ON PREVALENCE.

IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE OUR ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE OF A DEMENTIA-FREE WORLD WE ALSO NEED TO DO MORE TO EDUCATE AUSTRALIANS ABOUT THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN DIFFERENT CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS.

IT IS CRUCIAL THAT PEOPLE BETTER UNDERSTAND THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN DEMENTIA AND OTHER CHRONIC DISEASES SUCH AS DIABETES, CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE AND STROKE. EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF THOSE CONDITIONS WILL HELP TO LOWER A PERSON'S RISK OF DEMENTIA. SO WILL THE ADOPTION OF HEALTHIER LIFESTYLES.

THERE ARE NOW TWO DECADES OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE SHOWING THE THINGS EVERYONE CAN DO TO LOWER THEIR RISK OF DEVELOPING DEMENTIA.

APPROXIMATELY HALF OF THE CASES OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE WORLDWIDE ARE POTENTIALLY ATTRIBUTED TO RISK FACTORS SUCH AS DIABETES, HYPERTENSION, OBESITY, SMOKING, DEPRESSION, COGNITIVE INACTIVITY AND PHYSICAL INACTIVITY.

EVEN STAYING IN THE WORKFORCE CAN BE BENEFICIAL FOR THE BRAIN. I TOOK GREAT SATISFACTION IN A RECENT RESEARCH REPORT FROM FRANCE THAT FOUND DELAYING RETIREMENT WAS ASSOCIATED WITH LOWERING A PERSON'S RISK OF DEMENTIA.

I HADN'T PLANNED ON STOPPING ANY TIME SOON, BUT IT'S REASSURING TO GET AFFIRMATION THAT BEING MENTALLY ACTIVE DOESN'T HAVE TO STOP WHEN YOU REACH A PARTICULAR AGE. WHETHER YOU DO THIS THROUGH WORK OR PLAY, IT WILL BE BENEFICIAL TO YOUR BRAIN HEALTH.

IN SPITE OF OUR BEST EFFORTS HOWEVER, OUR MESSAGE ABOUT LIVING A BRAIN HEALTHY LIFE IS NOT GETTING THROUGH WELL ENOUGH. ONLY HALF OF ALL AUSTRALIANS BELIEVE THAT THEY MAY BE ABLE TO REDUCE THEIR RISK OF DEMENTIA; MOST OF THEM ARE AWARE ONLY OF THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL ACTIVITY.

THEY THINK THAT DOING A SUDOKU PUZZLE EVERY DAY IS ENOUGH TO WARD OFF THIS DEVASTATING DISEASE. FEW APPEAR TO UNDERSTAND THE LINK BETWEEN VASCULAR DISEASE AND DEMENTIA.

IT WOULD COST LITTLE TO RECOGNISE IN NATIONAL HEALTH CAMPAIGNS DIRECTED AT ALCOHOL, SMOKING AND OBESITY THAT IT'S NOT JUST PHYSICAL HEALTH THAT'S AT RISK BUT BRAIN HEALTH AS WELL.

THROUGH FUNDING PROVIDED FROM THE FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGEING, ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA HAS PRODUCED THE WORLD'S FIRST PUBLICLY- FUNDED DEMENTIA RISK REDUCTION PROGRAM – *YOUR BRAIN MATTERS*.

IT IS CENTRED ON THE BELIEF THAT IT TAKES FIVE SIMPLE STEPS TO MAXIMISE BRAIN HEALTH...

- **LOOK AFTER YOUR HEART**
- **BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE**
- **MENTALLY CHALLENGE YOUR BRAIN**
- **FOLLOW A HEALTHY DIET**
- **ENJOY SOCIAL ACTIVITY**

WE CANNOT SAY THAT BY LOOKING AFTER THEIR BRAIN, BODY AND HEART, BY DOING ALL THE RIGHT THINGS, THAT PEOPLE WILL DEFINITELY NOT GET A DIAGNOSIS OF DEMENTIA. BUT WE CAN SAY THAT THESE ACTIONS MAY REDUCE THEIR RISK. . IF ANYONE HERE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE PLEASE VISIT... YOURBRAINMATTERS.ORG.AU

DURING DEMENTIA AWARENESS WEEK WE LAUNCHED AN EVIDENCE-BASED PAPER IN PARTNERSHIP WITH FITNESS AUSTRALIA THAT REPORTS ON A RANGE OF INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL STUDIES WHICH HAVE EXAMINED THE LINKS BETWEEN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, BRAIN HEALTH AND DEMENTIA RISK.

WHAT I FIND PARTICULARLY FASCINATING, GIVEN THE FACT THAT I TRY TO DO SOME KIND OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY EVERY DAY, IS JUST HOW PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CHANGES THE BRAIN FOR THE BETTER.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY HELPS THE BRAIN TO GROW NEW CELLS AND CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THEM THROUGHOUT LIFE, THUS HELPING PEOPLE OF ALL AGES ON AVERAGE TO HAVE BETTER COGNITIVE ABILITIES, BETTER BRAIN HEALTH AND A LOWER RISK OF DEMENTIA. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ALSO HELPS TO INCREASE BLOOD FLOW TO THE BRAIN.

THE LINK BETWEEN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND BRAIN HEALTH HAS COME AS A SURPRISE TO MANY AND THAT KIND OF THINKING IS SOMETHING WE HOPE TO CHANGE.

THE PAPER REFERS TO A RECENT STUDY ESTIMATING THAT A 25 PER CENT REDUCTION IN PHYSICAL *INACTIVITY* RATES COULD POTENTIALLY PREVENT NEARLY ONE MILLION CASES OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE WORLDWIDE...THINK ABOUT THAT! ONE MILLION CASES LESS OF DEMENTIA SIMPLY BY PEOPLE TAKING UP REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.

IT SHOULDN'T BE SO HARD TO PERSUADE PEOPLE TO DO THIS.

THERE ARE MANY FORMS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY. AND IN CASE ANYONE HERE IS THINKING OF A CHANGE IN PHYSICAL LIFESTYLE (I HOPE MY WORDS ARE FALLING ON RECEPTIVE EARS) BE SURE TO CHOOSE SOMETHING YOU ENJOY DOING. TRY TO MIX IT UP WITH AEROBIC EXERCISE, STRENGTH AND RESISTANCE TRAINING, FLEXIBILITY AND BALANCE EXERCISES. EVEN BETTER, ENJOY BEING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE WITH FRIENDS AS SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IS ALSO BENEFICIAL TO BRAIN HEALTH.

IT'S EXCITING TO BE PART OF ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA; TO LEARN ABOUT THE OUTCOMES OF RESEARCH THAT HAVE THE PROSPECT IN TIME OF CHANGING ATTITUDES TO DEMENTIA.

NO DOUBT MANY OF YOU ARE AWARE, THAT THE RECENT FEDERAL ELECTION SAW SOME PROGRESS IN GETTING AN INCREASED INVESTMENT IN DEMENTIA RESEARCH.

ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA WARMLY WELCOMED THE COMMITMENT OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT, PRIOR TO THE ELECTION, TO PROVIDE AN ADDITIONAL \$200 MILLION OVER FIVE YEARS FOR DEMENTIA RESEARCH.

FOR US – AND EVERYONE AT RISK OF DEMENTIA – THIS WAS EXCITING NEWS INDEED FOR WITHOUT A SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT IN RESEARCH, WE CAN HAVE LITTLE HOPE OF UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSE OF DEMENTIA AND HOW TO MODIFY ITS PROGRESSION SO THAT ULTIMATELY THE PROSPECT OF A DEMENTIA-FREE LIFE BECOMES A REALITY.

I KNOW THAT ALL OF YOU HERE AND THE CURRAN FOUNDATION NEED NO PERSUADING OF THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTING IN MEDICAL RESEARCH AND IMPROVING THE SERVICES AVAILABLE TO OLDER AUSTRALIANS.

ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA'S DEMENTIA RESEARCH FOUNDATION HAS INVESTED IN EMERGING RESEARCHERS WITH THE AIM OF GIVING THEM OPPORTUNITIES TO PURSUE A CAREER IN DEMENTIA RESEARCH.

AN EVALUATION WE'VE DONE OF THE GRANT ACTIVITIES HAS SHOWN THAT OUR FAITH IN THE RESEARCHERS WE'VE INVESTED IN, HAS BEEN WELL AND TRULY JUSTIFIED.

I AM PROUD TO SAY THAT THE 108 NEW AND EARLY CAREER DEMENTIA RESEARCHERS, WHO HAVE RECEIVED \$4.4 MILLION FROM THE FOUNDATION OVER THE PAST DECADE, HAVE BETWEEN THEM PUBLISHED MORE THAN 1,100 PEER REVIEWED DEMENTIA PAPERS, AND SECURED ALMOST \$67 MILLION IN ADDITIONAL DEMENTIA RESEARCH FUNDING.

IT'S MORE THAN 100 YEARS SINCE DR ALOYSIUS ALZHEIMER GAVE HIS NAME TO ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE, BUT IT'S ONLY IN THE LAST 30 YEARS THAT THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASED INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT IN DEMENTIA RESEARCH – ALBEIT AT MUCH LOWER LEVELS THAN THAT FOR OTHER CHRONIC DISEASES.

IN SPITE OF THE GROSSLY INADEQUATE INVESTMENT IN DEMENTIA RESEARCH IN AUSTRALIA. OUR RESEARCHERS HAVE LED THE WORLD IN KEY AREAS OF DEMENTIA RESEARCH.

WE CAN BE PROUD THAT WE HAVE WORLD LEADERS IN KEY AREAS OF DEMENTIA RESEARCH...I'M THINKING OF PROFESSOR HENRY BRODATY AND HIS WORK IN THE BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF TRAINING AND COUNSELLING FOR FAMILY CARERS: PROFESSOR COLIN MASTERS IN IDENTIFYING THE AMYLOID PROTEINS THAT DAMAGE THE BRAIN, AND PROFESSOR PERRY BARCLETT ON THE CAPACITY OF THE STEM CELLS IN THE BRAIN TO GENERATE NEW NEURONS.

IF WE CAN DO SO MUCH WITH SO LITTLE JUST THINK OF WHERE WE MIGHT BE IN 30 YEARS TIME IF THERE IS A SERIOUS COMMITMENT TO DEMENTIA RESEARCH.

IN INVITE YOU ALL TO JOIN ME IN ADOPTING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TO AGEING...IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER YOU HAVE TO BE LUCKY TO BE OLD; NOT EVERYONE GETS TO BE OLD...

... AND AT THE SAME TIME, REFLECT ON WHAT WE CAN DO, NOT JUST FOR OURSELVES BUT FOR OUR FAMILIES AND GRANDCHILDREN.

THANK YOU