New Australian research from the Dementia Collaborative Research Centre – Carers and Consumers suggests that an understanding of dementia among healthcare staff could be improved.

According to study author Dr Elaine Fielding, the research has highlighted important gaps in knowledge and understanding of dementia, particularly in relation to more medical aspects such as risk reduction and the course of the disease.

“Respondents were particularly lacking in dementia knowledge such as what causes the disease, what the risk factors for dementia are, and what happens in dementia over time” Said Dr. Fielding.

The study used an online version of the Alzheimer’s disease Knowledge Scale, a validated 30-item questionnaire that measures an understanding of dementia across seven key domains. Staff from Queensland’s Northern Health Service District (which covers an area of 750,000 square kms from Mackay to Cape York and the NT border) were invited to complete the survey, and 360 responses were received.

“The study clearly showed that those who had had dementia specific training had better knowledge and understanding. Our primary recommendation is making dementia specific training a component of clinical practice”Dr Fielding commented.

“It is important that all kinds of health care staff understand dementia because they are caring for increasing numbers of people affected by the disease”.

For more information click on the links below:
Press Link: New Medical
Journal Link: BMC Geriatrics (1)
Dementia Collaborative Research Centre Link: www.dementiaresearch.org.au
ANAESTHESIA AND DEMENTIA: STILL MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

A better understanding of the relationship between anaesthesia, surgery and dementia has been identified as a serious issue at the 13th International Congress of Cardiothoracic and Vascular Anaesthesia held in Auckland, New Zealand in November last year.

A research team led by Associate Professor David Scott from St Vincent’s Hospital in Melbourne have been researching the effects of anaesthetics and surgery on the long-term cognitive function of older adults for some time. The team have found that older people who have already had mild cognitive impairment before anaesthesia were more likely than others to suffer increased cognitive dysfunction after surgery. More worryingly, some of these people do not return to their pre-operative level of cognitive function.

"Patients with post-operative cognitive dysfunction may experience a longer stay in hospital, have a reduced quality of life and even have an increased mortality", said Dr Scott.

“We need to be able to identify patients susceptible to post-operative cognitive dysfunction and modify how we treat them. We need to screen for pre-existing mild cognitive impairment, and we need to research the anaesthetics that we use to see if they exacerbate dementia and what we might need to change as a result.”

For more information click on the links below:
Press Link: The Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetics

AUSTRALIAN RESEARCHERS WORK TOWARDS EARLY DEMENTIA DETECTION

Researchers hope to detect the earliest signs of dementia in a new study involving over 10,000 Australian participants.

Led by the Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health in Melbourne, the project will assess the cognitive ability of healthy participants over the age of 50 using computerised cognitive tests. Participants will complete these tests monthly for six months, then every three months over a period of three years.

This will allow the researchers to evaluate changes in memory and other cognitive functions over time.

According to project leader Associate Professor David Darby, the TREAD project (short for ‘Trajectory-Related Early Alzheimer’s Database) will add to our understanding of normal and abnormal changes in mental functioning as we age.

“Our research aims to detect the earliest possible signs of dementia in otherwise healthy people even before significant symptoms are noticed,” he said.

“The online element makes it a convenient way for volunteers to test themselves repeatedly in their own homes or familiar environments.”

The study is looking for healthy volunteers aged 50 or over living in the greater Melbourne area. Participants will receive feedback on their performance, and those who may be experiencing memory decline will be offered a detailed medical assessment.

For more information click on the links below:
Press Link: DPS News
Study Link: tread.florey.edu.au
BENZODIAZEPINES MAY INCREASE DEMENTIA RISK IN OLDER PEOPLE

Benzodiazepines are a popular class of anti-anxiety drugs that have been linked with an increased risk of dementia in older demographics, according to a study published in *BMJ*. A team of researchers from the University of Bordeaux, France conducted a population based study to evaluate the association between the use of benzodiazepines and dementia.

1,063 participants who were over the age of 65, free of dementia and who had started using benzodiazepines within the previous two years were recruited from a larger French longitudinal ageing study. The participants were interviewed by a trained neuropsychologist to discuss personal characteristics, social and demographics background, life habits, health conditions, drug and medication use, functional abilities, depressive symptoms and cognitive abilities. Follow-up assessments took place every two to three years over 15 years.

Analyzing the data, the research team discovered that 250 of the 1063 participants had developed dementia. This was not the first time it has been suggested that benzodiazepines could have a negative impact on cognition. With this long-term study adding to the evidence, it emphasises how important it is that we properly monitor how treatments for anxiety or sleep problems are used.

For more information click on the links below:
Press Link: The Independent
Journal Link: BMJ (2)
EXPRESS YOURSELF EXHIBIT SHOWCASES DEPICTION OF ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

A large 80-print artistic piece depicting Alzheimer’s disease will be showcased at the Express Yourself Exhibit, in Manly, Sydney.

Mariah Burton, a 2012 art student used a print medium to depict a deteriorating brain with Alzheimer’s as a way to highlight the disease’s social impact on society. Mariah Burton was inspired by her own experience caring for her Nana who passed away from the disease.

The prints are visually outstanding and will be a feature at the Express Yourself Exhibit.

The Exhibit opens on Friday 8 Feb and runs until Sunday 10 March 2013 at the Esplanade, Manly.

ALZHEIMER’S AUSTRALIA VIC LAUNCHES THE YOUNGER ONSET DEMENTIA FORUM

Alzheimer’s Australia Vic recently launched a national online resource for Australians living with Younger Onset Dementia.

The new Younger Onset Dementia Forum provides a place where younger people with dementia, their families, carers and friends can gather online and share information. It provides a safe place to share stories, connect with others in a similar situation, ask questions and share information.

“Younger people diagnosed with dementia face a completely different set of professional and family related issues and we as an organisation have always been keen to ensure these are addressed,” said Jenny Philipp, Program Manager, Early Intervention Services at Alzheimer’s Australia Vic.

“We rolled out a pilot of the forum in Victoria eighteen months ago and were met with overwhelming enthusiasm from those consumers using it. For us this confirmed the need for a national outlet that allows for peer-to-peer information sharing and support 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our hope is that a supportive online community develops and that, through this forum, people know they are never alone.”

The Younger Onset Dementia Forum is proudly supported by the Wood Family Foundation.

The forum can be accessed at www.talkdementia.org.au

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INNOVATIVE ONLINE BRAIN HEALTH STUDY NEEDS YOU

The impact of our lifestyle choices when it comes to looking after the heart and lungs is widely understood. We all know how damaging smoking cigarettes and eating fatty foods can be for these organs. But do we know enough about how the choices we make every day affect the brain?

A ground-breaking new study is looking to measure the commitment of Australians to improving their brain health.

In an innovative move the team of researchers from The Australian National University and Alzheimer’s Australia will make use of online and mobile eHealth programs to conduct the study.

“The particular focus is on lifestyle choices that impact the health of the brain. There is more and more evidence to suggest that keeping your brain active, being fit and healthy, and looking after your heart contribute to promoting brain health and improving mental abilities,” Project leader Dr Maree Farrow said.

The study team has developed a range of eHealth programs that provide incentives for people to make lifestyle changes and live ‘brain healthy lives.’ Three different tools will be tested and members of the public are encouraged to take part.

Participants must:

- be over 18
- read and write English
- have daily access to email and internet
- have a smartphone or tablet
- undertake moderate physical exercise

The study involves four weeks of regular participation in one eHealth program and three surveys over four months. The time commitment depends on the individual and the goals they set for themselves. For instance, some may chose to exercise more. Others may choose to make a fundamental change to their diet.

People interested in taking part in the research can visit brainhealthstudy.org.au to view the participant information sheet and complete a brief screening tool.

2) Billioti de Gage,S., Et al. 2012. Benzodiazepine use and risk of dementia: prospective population based study, British Medical Journal, 345 doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.e6231

CONTACT

Any questions or comments are welcome.

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