Yesterday marked the launch of Alzheimer’s Australia 15th National Conference in Hobart, Tasmania. This three day event, with the inspiring theme of *The Tiles of Life – Colouring the Future*, will challenge participants to reflect on their experiences of living with dementia and how to escalate the call for better care.

The conference will bring together world leaders in social and medical dementia research. Ita Buttrose, Alzheimer’s Australia National President and 2013 Australian of the Year, will launch three publications directed at changing community attitudes towards dementia. These include: *Dementia Friendly Societies, Cognitive Impairment Symbol: Creating dementia friendly organisations and Respite Care for People Living with Dementia.*

“This year’s conference is an opportunity to reflect on how we can be positive in addressing dementia through promoting awareness, rehabilitation, social engagement, opportunities for creativity and self-expression” said Ita Buttrose.

“It’s also an opportunity to look to the future and the critical role investment in dementia research can play in identifying the cause of dementia as well as helping to find a cure and developing new treatments”.

“For anyone interested in improving the quality of life for people with dementia and their carers – and looking to a better future – this is a conference you shouldn’t miss in 2013”.

To follow what is happening at the conference follow #AlzAus13 on Twitter. Also keep your eyes on your inbox because Dementia News will be covering the event, publishing a special edition on the latest research discussed at the conference.

For more information about the conference please click on the following link:

Press: Alzheimer’s Australia
GENETICALLY MODIFIED MICE HAVE BEEN THE MAINSTAY WHEN IT COMES TO ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE RESEARCH, BUT DR. TERENCE TOWN AND HIS COLLEAGUES FROM LOS ANGELES SUGGEST INSTEAD WE SHOULD BE LOOKING AT RATS.

WHilst mice accurately replicate many human diseases, are easy to care for and have shorter life cycles than rats, Dr. Town and his team investigated whether rats could be a more suitable model than mice for understanding the human pathology of Alzheimer’s disease. Rats are closer to humans than mice in the evolutionary tree by 4-5 million years and so have a more comparable set of genes and proteins in their bodies to humans.

Dr. Town and his research team created rats that were genetically modified. The modifications included mutations that are seen in human Younger Onset Alzheimer’s disease, including an over production of the amyloid-beta protein.

The results showed that the rats replicated all the changes seen in a human brain with Alzheimer’s disease. It was also found that the rats developed tangles and loss of brain cells as they aged, which are features of Alzheimer’s disease that are not normally seen in mice.

“THE MODEL WILL HELP ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE various disease pathways involved in Alzheimer’s onset and progression and assist us in testing promising interventions” said Dr. Roderick Corriveau, a program director at the National Institute of Health (U.S.A).

“MORE WORK NEEDS TO BE DONE, but this genetically modified rat will be useful in progressing Alzheimer’s research to the next level and testing therapeutics. The researchers are currently working on ways to make this rat easily accessible to other scientists”.

For more information please click on the following links:
Press: Science Daily
Journal: The Journal of Neuroscience (1)

In the largest study of its kind to date, researchers have verified claims that a Mediterranean diet – rich in fish, olive oil and chicken may prevent cognitive decline.

THE studies findings were based on dietary information and cognitive screening tests of 17,478 African-American and Caucasian people, derived from information obtained from the Geographic and Racial Differences in Stroke (REGARDS) Study, 2003–2007.

THE study indicated that those who regularly ate a Mediterranean based diet were 19% less likely to develop problems in their thinking and memory skills than participants who did not.

“Diet is an important modifiable activity that could help in preserving cognitive functioning in late life,” said Dr Georgios Tsivgoulis, from University of Alabama at Birmingham and the University of Athens, Greece.

“HOWEVER, it is only one of several important lifestyle activities that might play a role in late-life mental functioning. Exercise, avoiding obesity, not smoking cigarettes and taking medications for conditions like diabetes and hypertension are also important.”

For more information please click on the following links:
Press: The Australian
Journal: Neurology (2)
NEW DSM-V GUIDELINES FOR DEMENTIA CHARACTERISATION

A new version of the psychology ‘bible’ is being released this May, which has implications for people with dementia. Dementia is now called Major Neurocognitive Disorder in DSM-V, but the term dementia will still be frequently used. The DSM-V Task Force on Neurocognitive Disorders said the aim of removing the emphasis on the term dementia was an attempt to remove the stigma surrounding dementia and related conditions.

Dementia as a Major Neurocognitive Disorder includes Alzheimer’s disease, cerebrovascular disease, frontotemporal lobar degeneration, Lewy Body disease, Huntington’s disease, traumatic brain injury and HIV-associated dementia. In the new edition the Task Force has removed the subcategories ‘With Early Onset’ (onset at age 65 years or below) and ‘With Late Onset’ stating that “there is little scientific rationale for retaining the distinction between early and late onset, as the underlying pathology is the same, and the threshold of age 65 is arbitrary at best.” Another change is that memory impairment will not be a mandatory requirement for classification, as dementia can be diagnosed in the absence of memory impairment if other areas of cognitive function are impaired.

A new category has been created in the 2010 DSM-5 proposal called Minor Neurocognitive Disorder. This new category will be for people that do not have severe dementia symptoms. The diagnostic criteria for Minor Neurocognitive Disorder could capture people that have age-related memory decline, rather than anything pathological. The symptoms of Minor Neurocognitive Disorder include “decline from a previous level of performance” based on a persons’ self-report, or having a slight reduction from their previous score in a cognitive assessment.

“It will take some time for the new criteria to become widely used in clinical practice” said Dr Maree Farrow, cognitive neuroscientist and Research Fellow with Alzheimer’s Australia and the Dementia Collaborative Research Centre - Early Diagnosis and Prevention. “But we are already seeing changes providing more accurate diagnosis of the various forms of dementia”.

For more information please click on the following link:
Press: Alzheimer’s Australia Q&A
The Love Loss and Laughter exhibition is a collection of over 85 photographs that have been taken between 2004 and 2013. The photographs, taken in Australia, the USA, France, India, Japan, the Dominican Republic, Canada, and Monaco offer a unique, compassionate and positive portrayal of those with dementia.

The exhibition will travel around Australia between April – November. For locations, click here.

The community are encouraged to get involved in the exhibition by submitting a photograph of someone living with dementia. These photographs will then go in the running to be displayed at the exhibition when it comes to their state or territory. To get involved, click here.
NORMA’S PROJECT: PREVENTING THE SEXUAL ASSAULT OF OLDER WOMEN

The sexual assault of older women is a very sensitive subject, but to date there has not been enough research into this crime. Researchers from The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, the University of Melbourne and the National Ageing Research Institute are bravely stepping forward to investigate this topic, with the aim of developing prevention guidelines.

“We hear a lot about the sexual assault of young women, which is important, however, we rarely hear of the trauma experienced by older women” said Dr Catherine Barrett, the chief researcher for the project, based at La Trobe University. “We know older women experience sexual assaults from family members and service providers, as well as from strangers, yet there is little community awareness of this issue and a lack of knowledge about prevention strategies,” said Dr Barrett.

We would like to invite you to share your story with Dr Barrett and her team to contribute to this vital research. The researchers would like to hear from older women (women over 65 years old) who have been sexually assaulted, or their close friends, family members or health and community workers as well as service providers who care for older women living at home or in residential care.

For more information, or to fill in an anonymous online survey please see the website or to speak directly about your experience please contact Dr Catherine Barrett.

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CONTACT

Any questions or comments are welcome.

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NATIONAL DEMENTIA HELPLINE
1800 100 500
www.fightdementia.org.au


2) Tsivgoulis,H., Et al. (2013). Adherence to a Mediterranean diet and risk of incident cognitive impairment, Neurology, doi: 10.1212/WNL.0b013e3182904f69

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