Australian of the Year Ita Buttrose has called on both sides of the political divide to commit to the full implementation of the vital aged care reform package, Living Longer. Living Better, to achieve the quality services older Australians urgently need.

Ms Buttrose, National President of Alzheimer’s Australia, told the National Press Club last week that the aged care system is failing older people.

“Many facilities are providing high quality care,” Ms Buttrose said.

“But we still see examples of discrimination and violation of basic human rights every day in our aged care system.

“In many cases, within weeks of entering residential care, people with dementia become unrecognisable in terms of their physical, mental and emotional welfare.”

She said that nearly one quarter of residents are being chemically restrained with anti-psychotic medications; calling this unacceptable and not consistent with good medical practice.

According to Alzheimer’s Australia, the Living Longer. Living Better. reform package announced by the Federal Government in April, 2012 is welcome but it is only a start.

To keep the pressure on both parties to ensure older residents, including those with dementia, have access to quality of care and the respect that they deserve, Ms Buttrose took the opportunity of her speech to launch Alzheimer’s Australia Fight Dementia Election 2013 Campaign which sets out how the Government can achieve better care for people with dementia.

“We need to improve the quality of residential care, develop flexible dementia-friendly respite services and provide more community care high care packages,” Ms Buttrose said.

“We must also invest much more into dementia research – $200 million over the next five years – if we are to have any hope at all in combating a condition that is expected to affect almost 900,000 people by 2050.”

Ms Buttrose challenged the Government and the community to make Australia a world leader in a system of care and support that enables people to achieve the highest quality of life, and makes them want to contribute and be a part of a society that values them.

For further information click on the following links:
Press (including Ita Buttrose’s full speech): Alzheimer’s Australia
Press: Fight Dementia Campaign Document
Researchers from the world-leading Australian Imaging and Biomarkers Lifestyle Flagship Study of Ageing, have identified a combination of proteins in the blood that could one day lead to simple test for the early detection of Alzheimer’s disease.

Specifically, the researchers have identified a non-invasive and inexpensive method to detect neocortical amyloid-beta burden - a known predictor of Alzheimer’s disease.

The method was generated by measuring the levels of biomarkers in the blood of 273 participants to assess the differences in blood plasma between groups of people with high or low amyloid beta levels in the brain. This identified nine blood markers that were associated with amyloid beta burden.

These markers were further examined by seeing the extent to which they could predict the presence of amyloid beta in the brain in a new sample comprising 817 healthy participants and 82 participants from the international Alzheimer’s disease Neuroimaging Initiative (ADNI) study; all of whom had undergone Positron Emission Tomography (PET) brain scans.

Using sophisticated computer modelling software to determine the most reliable combination of blood markers, the researchers were able to identify a set of five specific blood proteins that had a sensitivity of 80% (i.e., 80% of people who did have amyloid beta in the brain were correctly identified using the blood markers) and a specificity of 82% (i.e., the percentage of people without amyloid beta in the brain who were cleared by the blood test).

While these rates are still short of what would be required for a clinical test, the findings may have implications for the early detection of Alzheimer’s disease in the future. This is because amyloid beta is one of the earliest signs of Alzheimer’s disease, with observable build-ups in the brain starting as much as 17 years before dementia symptoms first appear.

“Early detection is critical if we are to make any real difference in the battle against Alzheimer’s, giving those at risk a much better chance of receiving treatment earlier, before it’s too late to do much about it,” said Dr Samantha Burnham from CSIRO’s Preventative health Flagship.

“We hope our continued research will lead to the development of a low cost, minimally invasive population based screening test for Alzheimer’s”.

Dr Chris Hatherly Research Manager of Alzheimer’s Australia also commented on study: “These findings demonstrate the value and the power of investment in health and medical research. We encourage the Government to look beyond the short-term economic problems, as complicated as these are, and invest in a future without dementia by committing an additional $200M to dementia research over the next 5 years”.

For more information click on the following links:
Press: Mail Online

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Cognitive training exercises - or brain training - may help prevent cognitive decline in healthy older adults, according to a review published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal.

Dr Raza Naqvi and a team of researchers from the Division of Geriatric Medicine, University of Toronto reviewed recent randomised controlled trials to summarise the latest evidence for physicians and their patients to help manage cognitive decline.

The review indicated that there was no strong evidence for complementary and natural treatments or vitamins in reducing the risk of cognitive decline.

However, mental exercise showed benefits in the three clinical trials included in the review. This included computerised training programs or intensive one-on-one personal cognitive training in memory, reasoning or speed of processing. In one trial, participants had significantly improved memory during 5-year follow-up periods. Another study showed an improvement in auditory memory and attention.

“This review provides some evidence to help clinicians and their patients address what strategies might prevent cognitive decline,” writes Dr. Raza Naqvi.

“Future studies should address the impact of cognitive training on the prevention of cognitive decline, and we encourage researchers to consider easily accessible tools such as crossword puzzles and sudoku that have not been rigorously studied.”

For further information click on the following links:
Press: Huff Post
Journal link: Canadian Medical Association Journal (2)
DISCUSS
THE SCIENCE

CHOLESTEROL

High levels of dietary cholesterol (particularly the ‘bad’ cholesterol LDL) are a common risk factor for both cardiovascular disease (Atherosclerosis) and Alzheimer’s disease.

Excess cholesterol is absorbed by cells inside the body and stored for future use. If too much cholesterol is absorbed by a cell, the cell’s ability to divide during regular maintenance and growth may be impeded. This may lead to an uneven distribution of chromosomes between the two new ‘daughter’ cells. Chromosomes contain the genes that are the blueprint for a cell – and the body. If cells do not have the normal complement of chromosomes (humans have 23 pairs) then the resulting cells will not function normally.

Cholesterol and Genetic Disorders

Niemann-Pick disease is a rare metabolic disorder of fat metabolism. People with this condition develop fatty deposits in multiple organs including the brain, which leads to multiple organ damage and dementia. The way the cells of people with Niemann-Pick disease are affected is similar to what occurs in people with atherosclerosis. The cells of people with Niemann-Pick disease contain large fatty deposits, which include cholesterol, as they lack an enzyme that processes certain fats.

CHOLESTEROL INCREASES RISK OF ALZHEIMER’S AND HEART DISEASE

Cardiovascular disease and Alzheimer’s disease may seem worlds apart in terms of the parts of the body affected, but an increasing body of evidence is showing that brain health and heart health are closely connected and that high cholesterol may damage the brain and its blood vessels.

Researchers from the Linda Crnic Institute and the University of Colorado aimed to investigate whether there is a common pathogenic pathway by which ‘bad’ cholesterol (LDL) promotes the development of both atherosclerosis and Alzheimer’s disease.

The study was carried out in two stages.

First, a specialised DNA test (called FISH: fluorescence in situ DNA hybridization) was used to determine whether LDL cholesterol increased chromosome abnormalities in mice fed a high cholesterol diet as well as in people with Niemann-Pick disease. Individuals living with Niemann-Pick disease demonstrate cholesterol accumulation in their cells, and the researchers were able to show that in both mice and humans with Niemann-Pick disease there was an excess of cells with chromosome abnormalities.

Next, to establish whether cholesterol was directly responsible for the chromosome abnormalities, the researchers analysed the chromosomes of different cells in cultures that were exposure to various types of fat.

The results showed that high levels of cholesterol in the mice and in patients with Niemann-Pick disease caused the accumulation of defective daughter cells with the wrong number of chromosomes. In particular, they found that cholesterol affected the chromosome that encodes the gene for amyloid peptide, a key protein associated with formation of Alzheimer’s disease.

Identifying the specific problems caused by excess bad cholesterol may lead to new approaches to therapy for many human disease, including Alzheimer’s disease, atherosclerosis and possibly cancer, all of which show signs of defective cell division.

For more information click on the following link:
Press: Medical Express
Journal: PlosOne (3)
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.
THE DEMENTIA COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH CENTRE ASSESSMENT AND BETTER CARE PHD SCHOLARSHIP 2013/14

Are you interested in undertaking research into ageing or dementia? Would you like to work with an experienced and enthusiastic multidisciplinary team, receive excellent supervision, have opportunities to develop research skills and contribute to the intellectual life of a Centre dedicated to improving the quality of life of people with dementia?

The Australian government funded Dementia Collaborative Research Centre - Assessment and Better Care (DCRC-ABC) for people with dementia at the University of New South Wales invites applications from graduates looking to build a career in research relevant to the area of Assessment and Better Care for People with Dementia. Seven universities are currently collaborating, with UNSW as the hub, to achieve these aims. Academic centres collaborating with UNSW are the Universities of Canberra, Monash, Newcastle, Sydney, Wollongong and Western Australia.

We welcome creative ideas and applications from graduates with a strong academic record from a wide variety of disciplines.

If you would like to discuss potential topics or require help finding a suitable supervisor, please contact us.

The value of the scholarship is $28,000 plus $2,000 agreed expenses per year of full-time study for a maximum of 18 months (final payment by 31 December 2014). This scholarship does not include payment of tuition fees.

Applicants must be eligible to undertake a PhD program, or be in the first or second year of a PhD program at an Australian University and must have a supervisor or co-supervisor from one of the academic partners of the DCRC-ABC.

Closing date for applications: Friday 31 May 2013

For a full copy of the application please click here.

For further details please contact: Ms Rosi Benninghaus on (02) 9385-2592 or email r.benninghaus@unsw.edu.au


CONTACT

Any questions or comments are welcome.

If you have any information you would like to see included in future editions please contact us:
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