Successful Aging

A publication from the Stein Institute for Research on Aging, Center for Healthy Aging

UC San Diego Center for Healthy Aging Hosts Its Third National Think Tank Meeting

Maja Gawronska, MA

How to build an age-friendly world? How to make communities and cities better for older adults? What are the best transportation, health care and senior-living models? How can we make it easy for older adults to stay connected to those around them and those they love? How to build a society that treats everyone with respect, regardless of age?

“Aging happens slowly, and it’s easy to postpone addressing these questions because it’s not a crisis of the moment,” said Dilip Jeste, MD, senior associate dean for healthy aging and senior care, distinguished professor of psychiatry and neurosciences at the UC San Diego School of Medicine, and director of the UC San Diego Center for Healthy Aging. “But one day we’ll look around and suddenly realize that almost everybody is old and we still don’t have answers to these questions. That’s why we have to start talking now.”

Dr. Jeste and colleagues are leading that conversation—and in the process are making UC San Diego a national, and perhaps international, hub for addressing the challenges and opportunities of an older America and world.

In December, the Center for Healthy Aging hosted its third think tank meeting. A high-caliber group of twenty-five physicians, researchers, and planning experts gathered to develop national recommendations to improve health care, housing, technology, and quality of life for the approximately 80 million Americans who are fifty-five years or older.

The UC San Diego Think Tank for Healthy Aging launched in November 2014. It has invited renowned specialists from across the country to talk about aging and technology, housing, transportation, intergenerational living, medicine, and design.

The December meeting was devoted mainly to creating age-friendly communities and livable cities. Many barriers persist. Some of these are physical. For example, poorly designed buildings or lack of transportation may prevent older people accessing places they want to visit. But many barriers result simply from the way we think about aging and the way we view and treat older people.

Speakers representing a variety of cities and communities from the United States and Europe shared their insights on practice and theory of building a more age-friendly world. Panelists included Chris Philipson, PhD, professor of sociology at Manchester University; John Feather, PhD, executive director of Grantmakers in Aging; Hayley Gleason, MSW, an activist from Boston; Ranna Parekh, MD, director, Division of Diversity and Health Equity, American Psychiatric Association; and Saul Levin, MD, chief executive officer and medical director of the American Psychiatric Association Washington.

The meeting also featured two speakers from San Diego: Ellen Schmeding, MFT, director, San Diego County Aging and Independence Services, and Alejandra Sotelo-Solis, age-friendly initiative manager at the San Diego Foundation.

In addition, Laura Carstensen, PhD, director, Stanford Center on Longevity, Stanford University, discussed redesigning long life through technology; and William Vega, PhD, provost professor and executive director, Edward R. Roybal Institute on Aging, University of Southern California, talked about health disparities in older populations.

Think tank experts are working on a report on age-friendly communities with recommendations for policy makers.

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The Impact of Exercise on Cognitive Functioning

Amy Jak, PhD
Associate Professor in Residence, Psychiatry, UC San Diego; Staff Neuropsychologist and Director, TBI Cognitive Rehabilitation Clinic, VA San Diego Healthcare System

February 17, 5:30 p.m.
Garren Auditorium
Biomedical Sciences Building
UC San Diego

Preparing for the Elder Boom in San Diego

Ai-jen Poo
MacArthur Fellow, Author of The Age of Dignity: Preparing for the Elder Boom in America

March 3, 5:30 p.m.
Medical Education and Telemedicine Auditorium
UC San Diego

February’s Lecture

Everybody knows they should probably exercise more to stay healthy. But did you know that your physical activity is also important for your brain? New findings show that staying active can improve cognitive function.

Learn more from Amy Jak, PhD, a clinical neuropsychologist and an expert in the topic. She has an extensive treatment and research experience with veterans with a history of traumatic brain injury. She is a staff neuropsychologist and director of the TBI Cognitive Rehabilitation Clinic at the VA San Diego Healthcare System and an assistant professor of psychiatry at UC San Diego. She is also a member of the VA Center of Excellence for Stress and Mental Health. Dr. Jak’s work has been funded by the VA, National Institutes of Health, and/or the Alzheimer’s Association since 2007. She is a fellow of Division 40 of the American Psychological Association, serves on the editorial board of the Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology, and has published more than sixty peer-reviewed articles.

To UC San Diego from Interstate 5 North or South

• Exit La Jolla Village Drive and drive west on La Jolla Village Drive.
• Turn right onto Villa La Jolla Drive and drive to the top of the hill (second light).
• Drive straight into Gilman Parking Structure and park in a V (visitor) spot; purchase parking at the kiosk.
• From Gilman Parking Structure, walk across the street toward the Stein Clinical Research Building and follow the small asphalt path to the right of the building.
• Cross the lawn or follow the sidewalk to the right, then left, to the Medical Teaching Facility Building (MTF).
• Walk under the MTF building bridge. Continue along the sidewalk to enter the Biomedical Sciences Building through large sliding glass doors.

• Turn left at the first hallway. Garren Auditorium will be on your right, Room 1105.

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Parkinson’s disease is difficult to diagnose, particularly in its early stages. Now, researchers at the UC San Diego School of Medicine—aided by a $375,000 grant from the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson’s Research—hope to improve the prospects of early diagnosis by identifying a biological signpost in the blood.

No standard diagnostic test exists for Parkinson’s disease, a chronic and progressive movement disorder affecting nearly one million Americans. Instead, physicians use patient symptoms, medical history, and a neurological exam to make a diagnosis.

“One of the really unmet needs with Parkinson’s disease is the creation of a simple diagnostic test that can identify the disease early on,” said UC San Diego study leader Paula Desplats, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Neurosciences and a mentor in UC San Diego’s High School Student Training in Aging Research Program. “Like other neurodegenerative disturbances, by the time a Parkinson’s patient has outward symptoms, many neurons are lost.”

Earlier diagnosis would enable earlier treatment and, with hope, delay neuronal damage and reduce disease symptoms, said Dr. Desplats, who is coprincipal investigator on the study with Travis Dunckley, PhD.

The search for biomarkers—signs that can indicate the presence or progress of a disease—is a major push in Parkinson’s research. The novelty of the UC San Diego study is that researchers will investigate DNA methylation in the blood as a potential signature or biomarker of Parkinson’s disease. DNA methylation is an epigenetic signaling mechanism used by cells to switch genes on and off, thereby affecting the cell’s physiology.

“The most important thing in our study is identifying a biomarker that could be easily tested in the clinic,” Dr. Desplats said. “You can’t probe the brain of the patient; you need to be able to look at tissue that is easily accessible. So we began to investigate changes in methylation that can be read in blood.”

UC San Diego Receives Michael J. Fox Foundation Grant to Identify Parkinson’s Biomarkers

BY BONNIE WARD

Think Tank continued from page 1

UC San Diego Center for Healthy Aging think tank members include the following:

Chair: Dilip V. Jeste, MD
- Associate Dean for Healthy Aging and Senior Care, UC San Diego
- Estelle and Edgar Levi Chair in Aging
- Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry and Neurosciences
- Director, Sam and Rose Stein Institute for Research on Aging

Cochair: Dan G. Blazer II, MD, MPH, PhD
- J. P. Gibbons Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Duke University

Kathleen C. Buckwalter, PhD, RN, FAAN
- Codirector, National Health Law and Policy Resource Center College of Law
- Professor of Research and Distinguished Nurse Scientist in Aging, Donald W. Reynolds Center of Geriatric Nursing Excellence, College of Nursing, University of Oklahoma Health Science Center

Laura Carstensen, PhD
- Fairleigh S. Dickinson Jr. Professor in Public Policy, Stanford University

- Professor of Psychology
- Director, Stanford Center on Longevity

Keri-Leigh Cassidy, MD, FRCPC
- Associate Professor, Dalhousie University
- Clinical Academic Director, Geriatric Psychiatry Program, Halifax, Nova Scotia

John Feather, PhD
- Chief Executive Officer, Grantmakers in Aging

Len Fishman, JD
- Director of the Gerontology Institute, University of Massachusetts Boston’s John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies

Gary L. Gottlieb, MD, MBA
- President and Chief Executive Officer, Partners HealthCare System, Inc.

Lisa P. Gwyther, MSW, LCSW
- Director, Family Support Program, Duke University Medical Center
- Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

Christopher A. Langston, PhD
- Program Director, The John A. Hartford Foundation

Kiang J. Liu, PhD
- Professor in Preventive Medicine-Epidemiology and Medicine-General Internal Medicine and Geriatrics, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine

Ramesh Rao, PhD
- Director, UC San Diego Division of the California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology (Calit2)
- Professor, Jacobs School of Engineering
- Qualcomm Endowed Chair in Telecommunications and Information Technology

Sandra Rosenbloom, PhD
- Professor of Planning, University of Texas
- Director, Innovation in Infrastructure Program at the Urban Institute

Judith A. Salerno, MD, MS
- President and Chief Executive Officer, Susan G. Komen

William Vega, PhD
- Provost Professor and Executive Director, Edward R. Roybal Institute on Aging, University of Southern California
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If you are interested in learning more, please contact Danielle Glorioso, LCSW, at (858) 246-0767 or dglorioso@ucsd.edu.

If you would like to make a contribution to the Center for Healthy Aging and the Stein Institute, there are three ways to give:

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BY PHONE OR E-MAIL
Please call Danielle Glorioso, LCSW, at (858) 246-0767 or e-mail dglorioso@ucsd.edu.

BY MAIL
Please make your check payable to UC San Diego Foundation; write Stein Institute or Center for Healthy Aging in the memo portion of the check and include a brief note specifying whether you would like your donation to go to the Stein Institute or the Center for Healthy Aging. Mail your gift to the address below:

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