Most of the more than five million people who are living with a form of dementia are taken care of by their family members or friends. Caregivers may feel that this is natural, but caring for an individual with Alzheimer’s disease or dementia can be challenging. In fact, caregivers are often called the invisible patients. They may feel fatigued, stressed, and emotionally and physically run-down. One of the tasks on a caregiver’s checklist should be self-care.

Since 1990, the UC San Diego Alzheimer’s Caregiver Program at the Stein Institute for Research on Aging has been focusing on the health effects of caregiving. Our research shows that caregivers may be at increased risk for a number of health consequences. Investigators found that caregivers have stress levels that are four times higher than that of their noncaregiving peers, and caregivers are more than twelve times as likely to experience significant symptoms of depression. Those who take care of loved ones also report significantly lower confidence in their ability to cope effectively with life stresses compared to noncaregivers.

Physically, caregivers appear to have higher rates of hypertension and appear to be at higher risk of developing cardiovascular diseases. For example, investigators found that compared to noncaregivers, caregivers have significantly higher blood concentrations of D-dimer, a biological marker believed to reflect the amount of atherosclerosis and vascular damage present in one’s body. Caregivers also appear to have higher blood concentrations of Interleukin-6 (IL-6), which increases coronary heart disease risk. In addition, the endothelium, which is the inner lining of blood vessels, appears to become less healthy the longer caregivers experience stress, and this may lead to cardiovascular illness.

But the story is not all bad. There is evidence that developing the right coping skills may benefit caregivers. Specifically, increases in stress seemed emotionally harmful in caregivers who felt least capable of coping well. However, stress had almost no impact on emotional health when caregivers felt confident in their coping skills. More confident caregivers also appeared to have lower blood pressure and lower IL-6 compared to less confident caregivers.

What can be done to help caregivers cope with the stresses they face?

The UC San Diego Alzheimer’s Caregiver Program is now conducting a research study to evaluate the effectiveness of two educational interventions for reducing stress, improving emotional well-being, and reducing risk for cardiovascular disease.

What is involved?

Eligible caregivers will receive up to five in-home health evaluations over the course of two years. These evaluations include an assessment of blood pressure, clinical and molecular markers of cardiovascular risk, and an ultrasound evaluation of arterial health. Participants will be randomly assigned to one of two educational programs designed to improve...
MAY

Healthy, (Nutrient) Wealthy, and Wise

Katherine Richman, MD
Clinical Professor, UC San Diego Health System

May 20, 2015, 5:30 p.m.
Garren Auditorium,
Biomedical Sciences Building,
UC San Diego

MAY’S LECTURE

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture emphasize eating more foods from plants, such as vegetables and beans, whole grains, and nuts. Learn more about the health benefits of choosing a diet heavy in fruits and vegetables from Katherine Richman, MD, medical director of Thornton Radiology and clinical professor of radiology at UC San Diego School of Medicine.

Dr. Richman is a body imager with a special interest in bone health and the effects of diet on health. She spends the majority of her time at Thornton Hospital. She has been the director of Thornton Radiology since 1999 and also serves as vice chair of Radiology Informatics. Dr. Richman received her medical degree at UC San Diego School of Medicine.

JUNE

How to Manage Your Medications

Joe Ma, Pharm D
Assistant Professor, Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences

June 17, 2015, 5:30 p.m.
Garren Auditorium,
Biomedical Sciences Building,
UC San Diego

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Directions to the Garren Auditorium from I-5 North or South

• Exit La Jolla Village Drive and drive west on La Jolla Village Drive.
• Turn right onto Villa La Jolla Drive.
• Go straight into Gilman Parking Structure.
• From Gilman Parking Structure, cross the street toward the Stein Clinical Research Building.
• Cross the lawn to the Medical Teaching Facility Building (MTF).
• Walk under the MTF bridge. Continue along the sidewalk to enter the Biomedical Sciences Building through the large sliding glass doors.
• Turn left at the first hallway. Garren Auditorium is in Room 1105.

LECTURES ON TV

Managing Menopause

April 9, 8:00 p.m.
April 10, 10:00 p.m.

Menopause is a natural phenomenon that occurs in all women. It cannot be avoided, but it can be managed. Learn more about management and treatment of menopausal symptoms from Kathryn Macaulay, MD, director of UC San Diego’s Menopause Health Program.

Please tune in to UCSD-TV to watch the Stein Institute’s monthly lecture series. Lectures air on

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Free Parking

In order to receive a free parking permit by mail, e-mail maja@ucsd.edu or call (858) 534-6299 NO LATER THAN THE LAST WEDNESDAY BEFORE THE LECTURE. Otherwise, you will need to purchase a permit from a Gilman Parking Structure kiosk or park in a metered space.

Note

If you park outside of Gilman Parking Structure or do not display your permit, you will receive a ticket. If you have a disabled person placard, you do not need a permit and are allowed to park in any handicap or metered space.
BY MAJA GAWRONSKA, MA

“When I grow older, I want to be someplace stimulating.” This has been Barbara Beskind’s motto for many years. Call her a late bloomer, but she has finally found the place. Last year she landed a job as an engineer at IDEO, a global design and innovation consultancy. At ninety-one years old, she calls this her dream job.

Barbara’s story has made a lot of headlines lately for a reason. Despite her age and health problems, such as troubles with her legs and macular degeneration, she is extremely active, positive, and young at heart. She claims that she feels at least twenty years younger than she is. “Age is not a barrier to performance,” she said.

In 2013, Barbara was watching 60 Minutes and was fascinated by David Kelley, the chief executive officer of IDEO, talking about design for older adults. She decided that she wanted to work for his company. Rewriting her résumé and paring it down from nine pages took two months, but a week after sending her résumé, Barbara was invited for an interview. The team of designers and engineers immediately fell in love with her wisdom, energy, and passion. Barbara now works with them as a consultant, and she is probably the most popular employee. When she comes in on Thursday mornings, there is a company-wide e-mail announcing that Barbara is in the office.

The age-centered projects Barbara is working on include a new type of walker and living quarters that will allow seniors to live independently next to their families. She enjoys thinking outside the box and making other people’s lives easier. Her other motto is “Find out what you can do to make life better for others.”

This was her goal even when she was a child. Growing up during the Great Depression has taught Barbara how to be creative. Her first design was for a hobbyhorse made of old tires. When it was time to choose a future job, she wanted to become an inventor and dreamed of studying engineering. But the reality was harsh. Barbara’s high school guidance counselor told her that women were not allowed to attend engineering school. She needed to find a different path, and she did it with style.

Barbara became an occupational therapist and enjoyed forty-four years of a successful career. Her accomplishments include six patents for inflatable devices that help children with balance issues, serving in the army as a major, and launching the first freestanding occupational therapy practice in the United States. She also opened a lamp shade replacement business and has written several books.

Barbara’s advice for successful aging? Live life as an adventure. Expect change, endorse it, and embrace it.

Do you know a Successful Ager?

If you know someone who is an example of successful aging, please contact us at (858) 534-6299 or aging@ucsd.edu with the person’s name, contact information, and a brief description of why you feel he or she is successfully aging. We will feature some of these individuals in future newsletters.

RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry

Appointments

Dan Sewell, MD, professor of psychiatry at UC San Diego School of Medicine and director of the Senior Behavioral Health Clinic, was elected as president-elect to the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry. AAGP promotes the mental health and well-being of older people through professional education, public advocacy, and support of career development for clinicians, educators, and researchers in geriatric psychiatry and mental health.

Ipsit Vahia, MD

American Geriatrics Society Clinical Student Research Award

Justin Yamamoto, a participant in our Medical Student Training in Aging Research (MSTAR) and a medical student from the University of Hawaii John Burns School of Medicine, has been selected to receive the 2015 American Geriatrics Society Clinical Student Research Award. Justin was awarded for his work conducted under the mentorship of Deborah Kado, MD, MS, associate professor in the UC San Diego Departments of Family and Preventive Medicine and Internal Medicine. His poster is titled “Trunk Lean Mass and Its Association with Three Measures of Kyphosis in Older Community Dwelling Persons.”

This award is presented to undergraduate students who submitted the most outstanding student abstract for the 2015 American Geriatric Society Annual Scientific Meeting. The award will be presented during the 2015 AGS annual meeting in May in National Harbor, Maryland.
Coping skills. The first provides six in-home meetings where caregivers will receive detailed information on how to care for themselves. The second provides six additional in-home meetings where caregivers will receive support and information on how to manage challenging situations. All meetings will be provided at the caregiver’s home and are at no cost.

Who is eligible?
If you are fifty-five years of age or older and provide in-home care for a loved one who has been diagnosed with dementia, you may qualify for this study.

Is there compensation?
Those who are eligible and choose to participate will be paid up to $500.

Who is the sponsor?
This study is sponsored by the National Institute on Aging (NIA), which is part of the National Institute of Health (NIH).

How can I find out more?
For more information about the study, please contact the study coordinator at (858) 534-9479.

Dr. Mausbach is an associate professor of psychiatry and a principal investigator of the UC San Diego Alzheimer’s Caregiver Study.