Diary of an MSTAR Student

BY COURTNEY MALONEY

After taking a small undergraduate group course at UC Berkeley on aging, death, and dying, I became interested in the subject of aging and working with elders. So, between my sophomore and junior years, I founded Bears for Elder Welfare, a student-run organization dedicated to educating the campus and wider community about aging and volunteering in the local elder community. (The bear is UC Berkeley’s mascot.)

When I entered medical school at UC San Diego, I wanted to pursue my interest in aging, so I am very grateful for the opportunity to participate in geriatrics research through the Medical Student Training in Aging Research (MSTAR) program.

My MSTAR project takes place at Senior Behavioral Health (SBH), a voluntary in-patient psychiatry unit at UC San Diego Medical Center in Hillcrest in downtown San Diego. My mentor is Ipsit Vahia, MD, director of research for SBH. The project aims to identify whether and how iPad can be used as a tool to improve psychiatric care by reducing behavioral symptoms and antipsychotic medication use.

The primary goals are to establish if iPad applications can be used to control patient behavior and, if so, what types of applications are most effective and in which conditions. We aim to collect quantitative data: iPad-use logs, behavioral PRN medication logs, mental status testing, and demographic information. We also collect qualitative information in narrative form, to develop case studies that may guide iPad use in the community.

One of my favorite aspects of this project is the amount of patient one-on-one time. As a rising second-year student with limited clinical experience, just being able to absorb rounds has been a great learning experience.

There are more than seventy apps on iPad available for patients. I go into the “living room” of the unit and see if any patients would be interested in using iPad with me. I sit with them, help them choose an app, and help them use the app as much or as little as they would like.

One of my most memorable patients, “Jane,” had a primary diagnosis of psychosis. She also had a history of stroke and was missing teeth, both of which contributed to dysarthria. One of my primary difficulties was learning to understand Jane. I would ask if she would like to use iPad with me or what type of app she would like to use, and I would often have difficulty deciphering her answer. I even tried having her write her response, but unfortunately that was not successful, either.

In the end I decided to try the pond app with her. This app mimics an interactive koi pond. When you touch the water, it ripples and the fish swim in the other direction. You can add lily pads, fish, and dragonflies, which all contribute to the serenity of the app.

continued on page 4
Successful Ager in Action
Free Public Lectures

October’s Lecture

Joe Ma, PharmD, is an associate professor of clinical pharmacy at the UC San Diego Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. Under a collaborative practice protocol, Dr. Ma sees patients and is able to start, stop, or modify therapy to treat symptoms and side effects of a disease and its treatment. His clinical practice focuses on pain and palliative care in an outpatient, multidisciplinary clinic at the UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center.

Dr. Ma is interested in examining the ways to evaluate drug-drug interactions, and in pain medication. His research has elucidated that several methods to estimate drug-metabolizing enzyme activity are inadequate and lack optimal validation.

UCSD-TV

Healthy, (Nutrient) Wealthy, and Wise: Diet for Healthy Aging

Have you ever wondered if becoming a vegan is safe, healthy, and sustainable? 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 the UC San Diego School of Medicine.

This lecture has been made possible through the generosity of GreatCall, the leading provider of easy-to-use technology for active aging.

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

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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 and drive to the top of the hill (second light).
• Drive straight into Gilman Parking Structure.
  o If you do not have a parking permit, park in a VP spot and purchase a permit at a kiosk.
  o If you have a parking permit, you must park in an A or B spot on the third level or higher.
• From Gilman Parking Structure, walk across the street toward the Stein Clinical Research Building.
• 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.

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Join the Conversation, Discuss, and Take Action

Take a look at the Stein Institute’s social media posts, tweets, and chats. Please help us develop our Twitter (@UCSDHealthAging) and Facebook (facebook.com/SteinInstitute) pages by sharing with your friends. Connect with us and with one another. We hope you will follow and like our networking tools!
The Old Men and the Sea

By Maja Gawronska, MA

This year marks the eighty-eighth anniversary of the first successful swim across the Catalina Channel by seventeen-year-old Canadian amateur champion George Young. It also marks another memorable event: On August 20, six local octogenarians completed a relay from Catalina Island to the mainland in 12 hours, 15 minutes and 23 seconds, in one-hour turns.

This team, called the Old Men and the Sea, set the record for the oldest people to swim the channel. All members are competitive swimmers, and two are Olympians.

Don Baker, a retired pharmacist, formed the group. Don started swimming during high school, when he lived on the beach. He went on to letter with the Oregon State University swim team for two years while he attended the School of Pharmacy there. He returned to swim training in his sixties, joined a Masters swim team, and for the past twenty-one years has been competing in swim events around the world.

Originally from California, Robert Beach enjoyed a long career as a circuit judge in Pinellas County, Florida. Since 1978 he has been in the pool five days a week for his 4,400-meter, 5:00 a.m. workout. He founded the St. Petersburg Masters swim team more than thirty years ago, and he trains at their home pool at North Shore, where he is known locally as the Marathon Man. Robert has won numerous state, national, and world age-group Masters swim competitions.

Bob Best was born at the height of the Depression, in 1932. Growing up in Redlands, California, he learned to swim in the pool on his family’s citrus ranch. Bob continued to swim at Fullerton Junior College and Iowa State University, where he competed in three NCAA championships. He went on to compete for the fourth army swim team at the All-Army Championships during his service years in the mid-1950s. Bob has been involved with Masters swimming since 1986, competing in many national championships and four Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA) World Championships.

Graham Johnson is originally from South Africa and came to the United States on a swim scholarship from the University of Oklahoma, where he was a three-time All-American. He went on to represent his home country at the 1952 Summer Olympics in Helsinki in the 400- and 1,500-meters events. Over the intervening sixty-two years, Graham has continued to compete successfully with the top talent in his age group, setting 129 US Masters national records, and 94 world records. In 2009 he set five world records in a single meet at the National Senior Games.

Bill Spore is now retired after a long career in obstetrics and gynecology with Kaiser in San Diego. He started his swim career in high school, where he achieved All-American in the hundred-yard freestyle event. Bill and lifelong friend Dave Radcliff (also a member of the team) swam together at San Diego High School and then participated in swimming and water polo at UC Berkeley. Bill stays fit by surfing, biking ninety to a hundred miles per week, and training in the pool three times a week.

Norm Stupfel was born and raised in San Francisco, where he was a member of the YMCA of San Francisco, high school swim teams, and the Olympic Club high school water polo team. He became a city lifeguard at the age of sixteen and made surf rescues in ocean temps as low as 48 degrees. He went to San Francisco State University where he swam and played water polo, and was later inducted into the San Francisco State University athletic hall of fame. Over the next forty-four years, Norm and his wife, Judy, raised a family in Northern California, where Norm also coached the local swim team and started a very successful second-grade learn-to-swim program. Norm was the official alternate for the Old Men and the Sea, diving in to assist if any other member was unable to participate before or during the relay event.

Two members of the Old Men and the Sea have stents, two have prostate cancer, and one has a metastatic cancer that limits use of his legs. The message they send is clear: Just because you are older or suffer from a disease, that doesn’t mean you cannot set goals and achieve them.

To learn more, visit http://www.theoldmenandthesea.com/.

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.
I sat with Jane and demonstrated how to use the pond app, moving my finger on the screen to make the water ripple. Jane’s mouth opened into an O and her eyes widened. I added two orange fish, and she made a sound of pure delight. I held iPad out to her, telling her she could try as well, but she just watched in rapt attention as I added more fish and ripples to the pond. After some time, I would ask if she would like to keep going; we would continue until she shook her head and verbally signified that she was done.

I used the pond app with Jane twice, both to a good reaction, but after hearing from a staff member that Jane liked Elvis’s music, I decided to try something new. I first played Hound Dog, and Jane smiled and danced in her wheelchair, bobbing her head and arms to the music as a nurse joined in. We played songs and danced until Jane grew tired. These types of interactions have been my favorite aspect of the project, as I enjoy spending time with the patients.

Currently and then when I return to school, I will be mostly involved in the writing portion of the project. I am working on a peer-reviewed type of manuscript and an iBook targeted to the general public to help guide iPad use in the larger community.

I have treasured this summer as an MSTAR student and all the opportunities it has afforded me—as an opportunity to learn more about geriatrics, psychiatry, and clinical medicine as a whole and also for the privilege to be able to just sit down with patients (with iPad or not!) and spend my day with them.