Members Approve Ballot Measure to Transform GSA Governance

GSA members have voted to approve changes to GSA’s bylaws and articles of incorporation, authorizing a plan to make several major updates to the Society’s governance structure.

As part of the ongoing GSA initiative 2020 Vision for Growth and Impact (so named to coincide with the Society’s 75th anniversary in 2020), GSA’s leaders and staff will now begin to implement the changes.

“The resounding acceptance of the new GSA governance structure in the January vote is the culmination of a four-year study, analysis, and planning process championed by society leadership with the participation of numerous society members,” said GSA President S. Michal Jazwinski, PhD, FGSA. “Congratulations to all of us! Special kudos to [former Presidents] David Ekerdt and to Barbara Resnick, who led the charge these past two years. We are not finished yet, however. The next few months bring more heavy lifting in making our new governance structure a reality.”

The new governance structure is designed to serve members’ needs in many ways. Chief among them, it will provide enhanced opportunities for member engagement and impact on the Society; stimulate greater interdisciplinary collaboration allowing members the opportunity to participate in more than one section; and strengthen GSA with an enhanced board structure providing essential continuity, multi-disciplinary expertise, and a focus on long-term growth.

Urging Senate to Support Geriatrics Training, Member Shares Telehealth Model

Speaking February 5 at a hearing of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP), University of Washington professor Katherine Bennett, MD, asked lawmakers to reauthorize the Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) and the Geriatrics Academic Career Award Program. She additionally demonstrated the value of supporting the Extension for Community Health Outcomes (ECHO) model to improve the care of older adults.

Bennett is an assistant professor of medicine at the University of Washington and a GSA member. She serves as the education lead for the Northwest Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Center, which is the University of Washington’s federally-funded GWEP. In that role, she is the founding medical director of Project ECHO–Geriatrics.

ECHO uses a telehealth model to bridge the gap in health care for rural and underserved communities. It links primary care clinicians with specialists through real-time learning made possible by inexpensive videoconferencing technology. Bennett’s program specifically connects physicians in training with a specialist panel that includes a geriatrician, social worker, psychiatrist, pharmacist, nurse, and Area Agency on Aging staff.

“Project ECHO programs need sustained funding to do their work well, and to reach more underserved patients. ECHOs are supported through a patchwork of funding.
From the CEO

Rich Heritage, Bright Future – GSA Sets Its Sights on Next 75 Years

By James Appleby, BSPharm, MPH • jappleby@geron.org

As noted in this month’s cover story, GSA is entering a time of transformative change following the membership’s recent approval of revised bylaws and endorsement of the 2020 Vision for Growth and Impact plan for GSA’s governance. GSA arrives at this point following several years of hard work by a diverse, multidisciplinary group of members. Their investment of time and expertise will pay dividends for many years as GSA charges into the future.

The Society’s newly streamlined bylaws are based on contemporary best practices for membership associations — providing better ease of understanding and the ability to increase collaboration across all membership segments.

This evolution of GSA’s governance structure will serve our members’ needs in many ways. Among them are an increase in the number of member service opportunities for professional growth, greater interdisciplinary networking, and an enhanced board structure that focuses on long-term growth. Beginning later this year, GSA members will be able to participate in more than one section, a tangible example of how these changes will set the stage for more interdisciplinary collaboration.

As a result of these bylaws changes, the GSA election cycle is shifting to June. (It previously opened in March). Stay tuned for announcements about the 2019 GSA elections for section, academy, and ESPO leadership. In addition, the GSA membership will be electing a new vice president (who serves a three-year term first as vice president, then president, and finally board chairperson) and multiple board members who will comprise the new 2020 GSA Board of Directors.

With preparations for this governance transformation underway, GSA is simultaneously setting the stage for future programmatic growth. A Strategic Planning Workgroup, comprising representatives from across GSA’s multidisciplinary membership, has been charged with revising the Society’s strategic plan to reflect the evolving gerontological landscape. This updated strategic plan will inform the development of GSA’s 2020 budget and will serve as a roadmap to guide the GSA Board of Directors over the next several years.

These exciting governance and strategic planning activities are propitiously timed as GSA gears-up to celebrate its 75th anniversary in 2020. GSA President Michal Jazwinski has appointed a workgroup to guide the Society’s activities in marking this milestone. It is a wonderful opportunity for the Society to reflect on its rich heritage of advancing research, practice, education, and policy in the aging arena, and to re-commit to its main purpose of advancing the scientific and scholarly study of aging and to promoting human welfare by the encouragement of gerontology in all its areas.

Your Society is taking the necessary steps to re-invent how it goes about advancing innovation in aging by strengthening its governance structure, revising its strategic plan, and using our 75th anniversary as a platform for celebrating its heritage and bright future. The Society has an extraordinary legacy thanks to the thousands of members who have shaped and advanced GSA since its inception in 1945. And the Society has a bright future thanks to the commitment of its current members as scholars, advocates, and mentors.

As GSA approaches this milestone, I encourage members to reflect on what the Society has meant to them and the role it has played in their professional and personal lives. And then ask the question, “How can I help foster the next generation of scholars who will carry GSA into its next 75 years of success?”

James Appleby, BSPharm, MPH
jappleby@geron.org
In Memoriam

Joan F. Van Nostrand, DPA, FGSA, passed away on January 22 at the age of 74. In her early career, she held several positions at the National Center for Health Statistics within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). She focused particularly on long-term care and nursing home issues. She served as director of the International Collaborative Effort on Aging, managing a team of researchers from 12 countries. She later served as director of research for the Office of Rural Health Policy in HHS. She focused on development of research agendas and studies designed to improve the health of residents of underserved rural areas. She was the author of more than 45 journal articles and book chapters on aging, long-term care, and rural topics. She was chair of the Gerontological Health Section of the American Public Health Association from 1987 to 1988, and received the section’s Key Award in 1993.

New Books by Members


Members in the News

- Joann Montepare, PhD, FGSA, and Carrie Andreoletti, PhD, were quoted in a January 15 blog post on the Considerable website titled “Colleges are making dramatic changes to attract older students.”
- On January 25, an article titled “A Mouthful of Pain for Older People: Sen. Cardin Introduces Medicare Dental Benefit” in India West quoted Bei Wu, PhD, FGSA, and Stephen Shuman, DDS, FGSA.
- Nicholas James, MS, was quoted in a February 4 article on the Stria News website titled “Young and on the Front Lines.”
- On February 10, Rozalyn M. Anderson, PhD, FGSA, was profiled in an article in The Irish Echo titled “Changing How We Age.”

Colleague Connection

This month’s $25 amazon.com gift certificate winner:
Rajean Moore, PhD, FGSA

The recipient, who became eligible after referring new member Dawn C. Simonson, MPA was randomly selected using randomizer.org. For more details on the Colleague Connection promotion visit www.geron.org/connection.

Member Spotlight

GSA’s website features monthly Q&A sessions with distinguished members. The current spotlight shines on:

Lyn Holley, PhD

Visit www.geron.org/membership to ask questions and read previous interviews. Connection promotion visit www.geron.org/connection.

Davies Named USC Distinguished Professor

Former GSA Biological Sciences Section Chair Kelvin J. A. Davies, PhD, DSc, FRSC, FRCP, FGSA, has been appointed as a distinguished professor by the University of Southern California (USC). The honor is awarded very selectively to those whose accomplishments have brought special renown to USC. Davies is the James E. Birren Chair in Gerontology, the executive vice dean of the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology (dean of faculty and dean of research), and the director of the Ethel Percy Andrus Gerontology Center. He holds a joint appointment as professor of molecular and computational biology in the Department of Biological Sciences, and he is the founder of the Los Angeles County School District/USC STAR program.

Haley Earns AAAS Fellow Status

William Haley, PhD, FGSA, has been named a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the world’s largest multidisciplinary scientific society. AAAS cited Haley “for advancing understanding of the psychological, social, and health impacts on family members providing care for relatives with Alzheimer’s disease, stroke, cancer and terminal illness.” He currently is a professor in the School of Aging Studies in the University of South Florida (USF) College of Behavioral and Community Sciences, who holds joint appointments in the Department of Psychology, Division of Geriatric Medicine, and College of Nursing. He is also a member of the USF Center for Hospice, Palliative Care, and End-of-Life Studies; the USF Global Center for Hearing and Speech Research; and an affiliate of the USF Florida Mental Health Institute.

GSAConnect Corner

- Blake Silverstrom, MA (Writing in response to a request for symposium abstracts on religious/spirituality and aging research involving the development of new theory, measurement/evaluation, methodology, or line of inquiry involving an understudied older adult population or network): Our organization (Heart2Heart Senior Outreach of South Florida) is currently implementing a case study utilizing Hope Theory as the theoretical approach of measuring the influence of hope through volunteer dyadic relationships with lonely and isolated seniors living in long-term care. We hope that this would be a worthwhile case study to be included in your spiritual inquiry symposium.
- Kelly M Trevino, PhD: We are reaching out to professional listservs to identify psychosocial oncology experts willing to participate in a research project we are conducting at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. The purpose of the project is to develop and test an intervention to help patients with cancer and their caregivers communicate about the patient’s illness and treatment preferences called Talking about Cancer (TAC). If you are interested in participating in this project or if you have any questions about the project, please contact me at (646) 888-0026 or trevinok@mskcc.org.
The Older Americans Act — A Bet on Bipartisanship

As partisan as our nation’s capital has been (and may intensify once the Mueller Russia investigation is completed), there are very positive signs that a new reauthorization of the Older Americans Act (OAA) will provide a respite from conflict, name-calling, and inaction. So, as we prepare for March Madness and choosing brackets, consider a small wager on the successful reauthorization of one of the federal government’s most successful programs.

The OAA is the major discretionary source of funding for home and community-based services for older adults — providing home-delivered and congregate meals, in-home supportive services, transportation, legal services, senior centers, caregiver support, evidence-based disease prevention and health promotion services, community service employment opportunities, the long-term care ombudsman program to protect the rights and quality of care for those in nursing homes, and programs to prevent elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

In addition, there are specific program funds to serve older Native American Indians and Native Hawaiians and Alaskan Natives. The OAA also supports multiple resource centers such as the Eldercare Locator, National Alzheimer’s and Dementia Resource Center, National Education and Resource Center on Women and Retirement Planning, National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center, National Aging Resource Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Minority Seniors, and the National Center on Elder Abuse. Finally, there are multiple research, demonstration, and training programs authorized under Title IV of the act, which have not received appropriations for many years; more on that shortly.

The programs are administered by the Administration on Aging (AoA) under the Administration for Community Living (ACL). The Older American Community Service Employment Programs in Title V is administered by the Department of Labor. Most of the federal funds are allocated to states according to a formula based on the state’s share of the U.S. population age 60 and older. The assistant secretary for aging has direct authority to the secretary of health and human services and is an advocate within the federal government for older adults. Current Assistant Secretary Lance Robertson, a gerontologist, has played the key role in convening the Elder Justice Coordinating Council, for example. In addition to federal funding, the OAA programs receive state and local funding. OAA services are provided through a national aging services network of 56 state agencies on aging, 629 area agencies on aging, nearly 20,000 service providers, 244 Tribal organizations, and 2 Native Hawaiian organizations representing 400 Tribes.

Reauthorization Concept

Before I say too much about this year’s OAA reauthorization, I want to remind you about the process itself. According to the U.S. Senate, an authorization is “A law that establishes or continues one or more federal agencies or programs, establishes the terms and conditions under which they operate, authorizes the enactment of appropriations, and specifies how appropriated funds are to be used.” The OAA was originally authorized in 1965, along with Medicare and Medicaid that year. It has been reauthorized many times since, usually for several years.

The authorization is only the first part of the process, with annual appropriations bills determining how much money will be allocated to the law and its various programs. In theory, agencies and programs must be authorized in order to receive appropriations, but program authorizations often expire yet Congress continues to fund the programs under the previous authorization. This happened to the OAA last time it was due to be reauthorized.

During the authorization process, changes to the law can be proposed. Some stakeholder organizations have been contemplating their proposed changes to the OAA for the last couple of years. Some members of Congress have been preparing for this year, as well.

Samantha Koehler, senior policy aide for Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) on the Special Committee on Aging, explained their approach: “In preparation for the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act, Senator Casey asked me to meet with Pennsylvania’s robust network of aging advocates. During these meetings, individuals from 34 Area Agencies on Aging representing 43 counties shared with me their priorities, including a request for greater flexibility in administering the National Family Caregiver Support Program, additional help serving LGBT seniors, and an interest in promoting greater innovation. The Older Americans Act provides critical support for seniors in Pennsylvania and across the country. These meetings serve as a guidepost for Senator Casey as he works to include Pennsylvania’s priorities in the reauthorization of the act.”

Casey is one of the primary leaders of the reauthorization effort partly because of his unique role as ranking member of the Senate Special Committee on Aging and as a member of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee (HELP). Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) has both of those committee assignments too, and as chair of the Committee on Aging, she is working very closely with Casey on a package of OAA amendments. HELP Committee Chair Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA) will take the lead on the OAA.

The HELP subcommittee with jurisdiction, Primary Health and Retirement Security, will play a smaller role during this reauthorization, but ranking member Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) is likely to continue his significant involvement in the process. During the last reauthorization, he introduced a large OAA bill with progressive elements that was eventually whittled down to the final bill that passed in 2016.

In the House, the OAA will find leadership from the House Education and Labor Committee’s Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), who serves as chair of the newly-created Civil Rights and Human Services Subcommittee. James Comer (R-KY) serves as the ranking member of the subcommittee, which appears to be taking the lead.
Advocacy Efforts

For more than six months, the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) has been developing a consensus list of more than 50 proposals to strengthen the OAA. There is often a struggle to determine whether a law needs a major overhaul or just some fine tuning. The message that AARP recently conveyed to leadership on the Hill reflected their leaning toward modest changes: “We believe that older persons would be best served with an on-time reauthorization, with only minor adjustments to existing programs to modernize and streamline operations, improve efficiency and coordination, and enhance effectiveness. … Additionally … we do not endorse major new initiatives or changes that will divert already inadequate resources from core OAA programs.”

The LCAO proposals affect all titles of the act and vary from funding increases to definition changes, and include such ideas as adding several programs that have been previously funded under other laws, strengthening caregiver support, clarifying employment targeting, adding an assisted living ombudsman program, ensuring that area agencies may contract with other entities to provide services, changing targeting requirements, and directing the assistant secretary to address a range of issues. Organizations will also take their ideas directly to Members of Congress outside the LCAO process. For example, the Coalition to Transform Advanced Care has partnered with the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) to develop ways to improve the care that older individuals with advanced illness receive.

In addition to working within the LCAO process, GSA has been leading with the National Council on Aging, the n4a, and the National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities on a proposal to revitalize Title IV of the act. This effort falls more into the bold category of changes to the act. Our proposal would establish a National Research, Demonstration, and Evaluation Center for the Aging Network, which would be headed by a director appointed by the assistant secretary. The director would be an individual with substantial knowledge of and experience in aging and health policy and research administration. This innovation center would provide a comprehensive and coordinated research program and would conduct, promote, coordinate, and provide for research, demonstration projects, training, and technical assistance. In addition, it would focus on more effective evaluation of current programs and activities of the act. The center would make grants to and enter into contracts with states, public agencies, private nonprofit agencies, institutions of higher education, and other aging organizations.

Our proposal would also establish a National Advisory Council for Aging Services Program Research, Demonstration, and Evaluation. The council would consist of leading experts on aging research, evaluation, training, and program evaluation, aging network stakeholders, and ex-officio representation from major federal agencies with substantial research programs related to OAA goals.

Amy Gotwals, n4a’s chief of public policy & external affairs, is optimistic about our collaboration on research and evaluation: “I think there’s increasing policymaker interest in aging issues, and the Older Americans Act is a great place for them to start. OAA programs and services support the way people want to age: in their homes and communities with maximum health and independence.”

Bob Blancato, executive director of the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs, has seen many reauthorizations: “One senses that the opportunity for an impactful OAA is here in 2019. … The OAA has a proven track record of keeping older adults independent through the intervention of key social and human services. It is a program with a solid return on investment from the economic and human perspective. The time for it to be rewarded has come. We must work to avoid parochial advocacy in the reauthorization process in 2019 as we had in 2016. The focus must be on the greater good and how much more the OAA can do for the older adult.”

As I have said many times, no legislative initiative is a “no-brainer” because even when the policies are agreed upon, one needs to have the politics and process in line, as well. However, things are starting out well — so, make your wagers on the OAA (and the final four), and bet the House, but don’t bet the house.
The latest information from GSA’s educational unit, The Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education

A Spotlight on AGHE Publications

By Elizabeth J. Bergman, PhD, and Lisa Borrero, PhD

Gerontology & Geriatrics Education

Gerontology & Geriatrics Education — a peer-reviewed journal that focuses on the exchange of information related to research, curriculum development, course and program evaluation, classroom and practice innovation, and other topics with educational implications for gerontology and geriatrics — is the official journal of the Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education. It is designed to appeal to a broad range of readers, including faculty, students, practitioners, administrators, and policy makers, and is dedicated to disseminating cutting edge, evidence-based knowledge in the field of gerontology and geriatrics education.

Look to Gerontology & Geriatrics Education for reports on:

• Innovations in teaching and training programs at the K-12, undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels, as well as in continuing education, paraprofessional, and public education programs.
• Issues, methods, and materials in the training and supervision of educators, researchers, and practitioners in academe and practice settings.
• New roles for gerontology and geriatrics educators
• New approaches to developing and supporting gerontology and geriatrics educational programs in a diversity of settings

The most recent issue of Gerontology & Geriatrics Education, Volume 40 Issue 1, focuses on the role of interprofessional education and team training in delivering optimal care to older adults.

Direct inquiries to Editor-in-Chief Judy Howe at judy.howe@msm.edu or Managing Editor Elizabeth Bergman at ebergman@ithaca.edu. Visit www.tandfonline.com/toc/wgge20/current to view an archive.

AGHEExchange

Unfamiliar with the Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) and interested in learning about it? Or, do you already have a good handle on AGHE’s role within GSA but want to know more? Ask to be added to the mailing list for AGHEExchange! One of AGHE’s two publications, AGHEExchange is an electronic newsletter, published quarterly, offering information about a wide variety of projects and initiatives spearheaded by AGHE members as well as other relevant news.

As GSA’s educational organization, AGHE works in a multitude of ways to advance gerontology and geriatrics education in academic institutions. The most recent issue of the newsletter, Volume 41 Number 2, published just before the GSA Annual Scientific Meeting in November, highlighted AGHE-focused sessions at the meeting, and informed readers about components of AGHE’s recent full integration within GSA, such as new and restructured interest groups. If you would like to contribute content to AGHEExchange, are interested in being added to the distribution list, and/or have questions, please contact Editor Lisa Borrero at borrarol@uindy.edu. Visit www.aghe.org/publications/aghexchange to view an archive.

Continued from page 1 – Members Approve Ballot Measure to Transform GSA Governance

“The governance review of GSA helped us to appreciate how many of our members want to contribute service to the field,” said GSA Past President David J. Ekerdt, PhD, FGSA. “The members’ recent strong approval of the governance changes is a vote of confidence in GSA’s intention to build new opportunities for members to use their time, initiative, and creativity to strengthen the Society in the years ahead.”

Full details of the plan remain available at www.geron.org/2020vision. Forthcoming steps in the implementation phase are noted below.

• The revised bylaws will take effect November 1, 2019. The GSA Executive Committee and GSA staff will begin implementation planning immediately.
• Election slates for Society-wide and GSA Section elections will be developed this spring. The GSA Governance Committee will lead this charge with input from section officers.
• Member voting for all GSA elections will open in June 2019.
• The GSA Executive Committee, Council, and committees will continue to operate as planned for the remainder of the governance year.
• The committee structure will transition to be in alignment with the 2020 Vision for Growth and Impact by November 1, 2019.
• The process for participating in more than one section will be created and launched November 1, 2019.
• Existing governance policies and procedures will be reviewed and updated to align with the amended bylaws.

“This is an exciting time for the Society as we build on the rich heritage of our first 75 years, a milestone GSA will celebrate in 2020, and strengthen the governance process in anticipation of the next 75 years of advancing innovation in aging,” said GSA CEO James Appleby, BSPharm, MPH.
ESPO: Resources, Networking, and Collaboration

By Jacquelyn Minahan, MA

Want more career development or aging resources, but unsure of where to find them? The Emerging Scholar and Professional Organization (ESPO) is the perfect place to start! Every GSA student and transitional member is automatically an ESPO member. ESPO exists as a home for students, trainees, and junior scholars, and represents the interests of these members within the GSA community at large. Below are numerous opportunities and resources available specifically to ESPO members. These offer a multitude of ways to get involved in the organization and connect with other ESPO members.

Dissertation Writing Group • The dissertation writing group is a free ESPO-members-only, peer-led group that offers a supportive environment in which members can exchange critical feedback, combat procrastination, and stay accountable to their dissertation writing goals. Groups run for the duration of a semester, and meet biweekly via Skype for 60 to 90 minutes. Groups are small (comprised of three to six members), and facilitate cohesiveness and productivity. As part of the group, you will create a writing schedule with measurable goals; report on these goals during each meeting; provide your writing to the group for their review and contribute feedback on other members’ writing; provide support; and troubleshoot challenges that may arise in the dissertation process. For additional information, visit www.geron.org/dwg.

Webinars • Are you looking for aging-related resources, and not sure where to start? Wondering about professional development, and needing more information? ESPO offers biannual webinars focusing on areas of professional development. Past webinars have included navigating the academic job market, publishing, mentorship, and grant writing. These webinars are developed by ESPO members and are designed to offer resources specifically geared toward this population. Additionally, the GSA webinars offer a wide variety of aging-specific resources and are available to all ESPO members. These webinars are offered throughout the year, and can be found at www.geron.org/webinar.

Mentor Match • The Mentor Match program offers an online career networking platform designed to enhance professional development. Mentees can search through registered mentors to find individuals most closely aligned with the experience and expertise about which they are looking to be mentored. Similarly, mentors can search through registered mentees to identify potential matches. Connecting with a match is as simple as clicking their badge! For more information, visit www.geron.org/programs-services/mentor-program.

GSA Connect • GSA Connect is an online networking platform offered to all GSA members. This platform serves as a place to connect with other professionals in your area of expertise, and a space to collaborate, and to work together more productively than ever before. GSA Connect features communities that members can join to share ideas, ask questions, and brainstorm across disciplines and sections. It also contains a resource library with documents, links to webinars, and other resources. ESPO has its own subcommunity, called the ESPO Community, which is comprised solely of ESPO members. This is a great place to network and collaborate with other ESPO members. Please visit www.geron.org/stay-connected/gsa-connect for more information.

Awards • ESPO offers a number of awards specifically for students and transitional members that are presented annually at the Annual Scientific Meeting. These awards are intended to highlight the accomplishments of student, transition, and early career professionals. A variety of awards are offered (e.g., poster, paper, travel). Additionally, ESPO members are eligible for several society-wide awards and section-specific awards, also presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting. For additional information, including submission deadlines, visit www.geron.org/membership/awards/espo-awards.

Want to get involved in ESPO, or have further questions? Please email espo@geron.org.

AARP Creates Resume Service Tailored to Older Workers

AARP has launched a new resume advice and professional writing service tailored to help older workers who are looking for new jobs or switching positions. “Resume writing is crucial as more and more older workers stay in the workforce, often looking for new jobs, or even new careers,” said Susan Weinstock, AARP vice president for financial resilience programs. “This exciting new service is a big step forward for those making a job change. Older workers can face unique challenges in the employment market, and part of our mission is to help them successfully navigate those obstacles and find rewarding work.” The service, AARP Resume Advisor, is available at www.aarp.org/work/resume-advisor/ and offers a free expert resume review. Job seekers will receive objective feedback on how effectively their resume communicates their skills and expertise, and personalized recommendations to make it stand out from the competition.
Gerontologists Give Back with Friendship and Flowers

By Sarah Canham, PhD

At the recent GSA 2018 Annual Scientific Meeting conference in Boston, eight conference attendees representing Israel, Sweden, and the U.S. joined me to volunteer for the Gerontologists Giving Back service event. This is an annual event I have been coordinating for the Society in collaboration with Dr. Leanne Clark-Shirley since 2008.

On Thursday, November 14, our group of volunteers hopped aboard “the T” to head to the Rogerson House in Jamaican Plain, Massachusetts. The Rogerson House is a dementia care facility providing 66 units of assisted living, a day program, and respite care for people with memory loss.

When we arrived, we met the local coordinator from the Boston chapter of Little Brothers—Friends of the Elderly who organized a “Friendship and Flowers” event for our group. Armed with bouquets of flowers, we toured three floors of the Rogerson House, meeting residents as they ate lunch, engaged in holiday card making activities, or sang together during music therapy. We enjoyed an hour and a half of friendly visitation and engagement. Upon seeing, smelling, and feeling the flowers, many of the residents lit up with joy. As staff from the Rogerson House reminded us, “Any experience we can bring them is great because they can’t get out like you and I can...”

While not all residents wanted to engage or fancied flowers, a number of highlights from the event stand out in my mind.

- “Judy” came to life when I first sat beside her and gave her a bouquet. Making a delighted whooping sound, she twirled the flowers around clearly delighted.
- Another resident, “Marie” who did not speak English was able to engage with one of our volunteers who was able to communicate in her native Russian. Staff of the Rogerson House, who don’t speak Russian, have been challenged in understanding Marie’s needs, so this opportunity to engage with Marie was especially touching.
- “José”, a Spanish resident was particularly delighted by our visit. When our Spanish speaking volunteer asked him to dance, he jumped at the request and did not want to stop. This clearly connected him to his roots and passion for dancing.

Though our visit was only a few short hours, the event gave volunteers an opportunity to get out into the local community, observe the lives of older adults, and supplement their academic learnings and conference experience. Several volunteers reflected on their experience as a volunteer:

- “I have dedicated my research career to studying older adults with dementia. Spending some hours out of the GSA conference to visit and show care for these people felt right. It was an extremely rewarding experience for me.” – Marianne Chanti-Ketterl
- “It was wonderful to step away from the GSA conference to share time with the residents of Rogerson House. With them, I baked sweet potato and raisin muffins; talked about art, traveling, hockey, and the fun of being a big sister; and enjoyed beautiful harmonica music played by one of the residents. Being in, learning from, and laughing with the people in the community gives me the most joy as a researcher. This service event enriched our gerontological imaginations.” – Jarmin Yeh

It has always been the vision behind our event to link Gerontologists to the local communities that we descend upon when we travel to present our emerging research at the annual conference. Getting our “hands dirty” in the community enables us to stay grounded in why we research and teach: to improve the lives of older adults.

mechanisms that are often short-term and unpredictable,” Bennett said in her testimony. “I am very hopeful that through this committee, you will enact a strategy to sustain and grow ECHO to allow all patients, regardless of where they live, to receive the highest quality health care.”

At the hearing, which was titled “How Primary Care Affects Health Care Costs and Outcomes,” she shared that there are currently 10 geriatrics-focused ECHOs throughout the country. She said this type of care can improve quality of life for older adults and reduce costs from preventable hospital readmissions and nursing home placement.

“Many geriatrics ECHOs do not have patient outcomes data quite yet, and we need continued funding to obtain this critical information,” Bennett told the committee. “Knowing that we are moving best practices to the front-line of primary care, and based on what I have seen, I am confident the positive outcomes are there.”

HELP Committee Ranking Member Senator Patty Murray and her staff have a strong link to the University of Washington’s GWEP. Last year, Murray invited its project director, GSA member Elizabeth Phelan, MD, MS, to testify. GSA also works through its role as a co-convener of the Eldercare Workforce Alliance to promote and advocate for support of GWEPs and their programs, like ECHO–Geriatrics.
Applications Sought for New NIA-Supported Coordinating Center

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) is inviting applications for a Demography and Economics of Aging and Alzheimer’s Disease/Alzheimer’s Disease Related Dementias Coordinating Center whose purpose is to act as a hub, serving the needs of both traditional Centers on the Demography and Economics of Aging and Centers on the Demography and Economics of Alzheimer’s Disease and Alzheimer’s Related Dementias, as well as the needs of NIA program staff. The goals of the overall center program are to seed new lines of research in the demography and economics of aging; and demography, economics, and health services research relevant to Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias, and to grow the number of researchers engaged in these fields through a variety of research and infrastructure activities that are built around specific research themes. Center themes may, as relevant, be advanced by collaborations, data sharing, and interdisciplinary interactions with related scientific fields as long as they are designed to advance research on how demographic, social, economic, institutional, geographic, and other factors at the population level influence health at older ages. The application due date is June 3. Review full details at bit.ly/2X15q1K.

Federal Funds Slated for TBI-Related Dementia Research

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke and the National Institute on Aging have issued a funding opportunity announcement that invites investigation of biological and clinical measures of traumatic brain injury (TBI)-related progressive neurodegeneration and neurocognitive decline associated with increased risk for dementia and/or traumatic encephalopathy syndrome. Investigations should be based on existing, well-characterized populations of patients with a history of TBI that are enriched for increased risk of cognitive impairment or dementia and can continue to be followed longitudinally; additional subjects may be recruited as appropriate. The overall goal is to advance knowledge of the underlying pathophysiology and clinical characterization of the chronic effects of TBI that distinguish static-chronic TBI cognitive impairment from those that lead to progressive neurodegeneration associated with TES and dementia. A critical feature of this announcement includes the broad sharing of clinical, neuroimaging, physiological, and biospecimen data to further advance research in this area. Applications are due April 15. The full announcement can be read at bit.ly/2Eiktdw.

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Interacting with More People Is Shown to Keep Older Adults More Active

It’s been said that variety is the spice of life, and now scientists say variety in your social circle may help you live longer. Researchers at The University of Texas (UT) at Austin have found that older adults who spend more time interacting with a wide range of people were more likely to be physically active and had greater emotional well-being.

In a new article in *The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, the researchers report that study participants who interacted more with family members and close friends — as well as acquaintances, casual friends, service providers, and strangers — were more likely to have higher levels of physical activity, less time spent sitting or lying around, greater positive moods, and fewer negative feelings. It is the first study to link social engagement with physical activity throughout the day.

“Adults often grow less physically active and more sedentary as they age, and these behaviors pose a risk factor for disease and death,” said Karen Fingerman, PhD, FGSA, a professor of human development and family sciences at UT Austin and the director of the university’s new Texas Aging & Longevity Center. “It is difficult to convince people to go to the gym or commit to work out on a regular basis. But they may be willing to reach out to acquaintances, attend an organized group event, or talk to the barrista who serves them at their favorite coffee shop. Socializing in these contexts also can increase physical activity and diverse behaviors in ways that benefit health without necessarily working up a sweat.”

The researchers asked study participants about their activities and social encounters every three hours for about a week. Participants also wore electronic devices to monitor their physical activity.
activity. Fingerman and the team observed that during the three-hour periods when participants were engaging with a greater variety of social partners, they reported engaging in a greater variety of activities such as leaving the house, walking, talking with others, or shopping. They also engaged in more objectively measured physical activity, and less time being sedentary.

Previous studies have shown that close social ties, like family and close friends, can be beneficial to older adults by providing a buffer against stress and improving emotional well-being. Researchers had not examined physical activity or the benefits of more peripheral social ties. This study showed those acquaintances or peripheral ties may encourage older adults to be more physically active, a key factor that has been shown to contribute to physical and emotional health, as well as cognitive ability.

“Older adults may be able to be more sedentary with their close friends and family — sitting and watching TV or otherwise lounging at home,” Fingerman said. “But to engage with acquaintances, older adults must leave the house, or at least get up out of their chair to answer the door.”

The study included more than 300 adults over 65 years old who lived in the Austin metro area and controlled for factors such as age, race, gender, marital status, education and ethnicity.

“Prior research on aging has focused almost entirely on the benefits of social connection with close social ties such as a spouse or an adult child,” said co-author Debra Umberson, PhD FGSA, a sociology professor and director of UT Austin’s Population Research Center. “This new research relies on truly novel data that capture both the amount and quality of contact with all types of people that the elderly encounter throughout the day — and the results show us that these routine encounters have important benefits for activity levels and psychological well-being. This new information suggests the importance of policies and programs that support and promote routine and informal social participation.”

The new article is titled “Variety is the Spice of Late Life: Social Integration and Daily Activity,” and the research was funded by the National Institute on Aging and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. UT Austin graduate student Meng Huo, MA, and University of California at Irvine Professor of Psychology Susan T. Charles, PhD, FGSA, contributed to the study.

Dr. William Haley Named New AAAS Fellow

Dr. William Haley in the University of South Florida School of Aging Studies was elected a Fellow in the Psychology Section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) for advancing understanding of the psychological, social, and health impacts on family members providing care for relatives with Alzheimer’s disease, stroke, cancer and terminal illness. Fellowship in the AAAS is reserved for “A member whose efforts on behalf of the advancement of science or its applications are scientifically or socially distinguished.” The School of Aging Studies congratulates Dr. Haley on this recognition of his research.

Please visit the University of South Florida School of Aging Studies at agingstudies.usf.edu

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RAND is pleased to announce the 26th annual RAND Summer Institute (RSI), which will take place in Santa Monica, CA, July 8-11, 2019.

The RSI consists of two conferences addressing critical issues facing our aging population: a Mini-Medical School for Social Scientists (July 8-9) and a workshop on the Demography, Economics, Psychology and Epidemiology of Aging (July 10-11). The primary aim of the RSI is to expose scholars interested in the study of aging to a wide range of research being conducted in fields beyond their own specialties.

We invite all interested researchers to apply to attend the 2019 RSI. Applicants may apply for fellowship support to pay for registration, travel, and accommodations.

Both the Mini-Med School and the workshop are described more fully at our web site: http://www.rand.org/labor/aging/ksi/. For additional information, please contact Cary Greif (cary_greif@rand.org).

RSI is sponsored by the National Institute on Aging and the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research at the National Institutes of Health. RAND is an Equal Opportunity Employer Minorities/Females/Vets/Disabled
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