Research Report

alzheimer's wa
the dementia experts

April 2019

1. New research from the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) shows the rates of dementia in older people may be declining. Using data from sources such as the Registry of Older South Australians (ROSA), the study looked at 188,846 older people receiving home care services, and 348,311 older people starting long-term care, and found that the prevalence of dementia fell significantly between 2008 to 2014. Researchers believe public health measures, changes in lifestyles, higher education rates and a decline in smoking are all contributing factors, but warn that Australian's ageing population will still mean an increase in the amount of older Australian's *living* with dementia and accessing aged care.
   https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-15/new-study-finds-dementia-rates-have-fallen/10904954

2. People living in aged care facilities, who have mild dementia, have an opportunity to take part in a new study looking at medicinal cannabis as a treatment for the neurological disease. Researchers at Notre Dame University are recruiting 50 people aged 65 and older to participate in the study, which will analyse the effects of the drug on neuro-psychotic symptoms associated with dementia such as "aggression and agitation", as well as its ability to ease nausea, anxiety and sleep issues. Aged care facility managers who are interested in having suitable residents involved can contact Dr Amanda Timler on 9433 0795 or via email at Amanda.Timler@nd.edu.au
   https://thewest.com.au/lifestyle/medicine/university-of-notre-dame-goes-green-on-cannabis-trial-for-dementia-patients-ng-b881160541z

3. Neuroscientists from the University of California have conducted a study into genetic mutations that could potentially affect toxic tau build up in the brain. Their findings showed one particular gene - RASD2 - previously linked to Huntington's disease, appeared to be responsive to drug treatments. The scientists tested *Lonafarni,* a failed cancer treatment, in mouse models of dementia, and found that at 20 weeks, the mice (previously exhibiting erratic behaviours at 10 weeks) were behaving normally. Brain scans showed the drug had reduced the number of tau tangles and halted inflammation and tissue damage. Tau accumulation in the hippocampus was almost completely eradicated. Further testing produced similar results. The researchers are awaiting results from another study before they will be able to test the drug in humans; Lonafarni is currently being trialled as a treatment for a genetic disorder called Progeria.
   https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/324815.php

   and also see https://theconversation.com/an-unexpected-pathway-to-treating-neurodegenerative-diseases-114135

4. The Federal Government has invested $10 million in a new research centre at Curtin University that will help improve the lives of people living with, or at risk of, dementia. The *new Dementia Centre of Excellence* will study the preventative, primary and chronic disease management needs of people living with dementia, as well as their mental health. With additional contributions from Curtin University itself, targeted workforce training programs for staff working in the community, hospitals and aged care facilities will also be part of the Centre's focus.
https://www.miragenews.com/curtin-establishes-new-dementia-centre-of-excellence/

5. Queensland University of Technology has conducted a pilot study into the factors that people living in aged care consider important for their overall wellbeing. The 12-month study involved 10 residents aged 66 to 92 years, residing in an aged care facility. The residents were required to take photos of their daily life for a year and, at the end of the pilot, 19 images were selected to be displayed in an exhibition that was open to the public. Key themes appeared throughout, including friendship, leisure activities and social events, as well as connection to nature and the outdoors. The researchers encouraged other providers to undertake similar projects in order to identify what is important to their residents.
https://www.australianageingagenda.com.au/2019/03/27/photovoice-project-identifies-what-residents-value/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Newsletter%20-%2027th%20March%202019&utm_content=Newsletter%20-%2027th%20March%202019+Version+A+CID_a6c3a10744de31c07e11c24838d79479&utm_source=Campaign%20Monitor&utm_term=Photography%20project%20identifies%20what%20residents%20value

6. Research has shown that loneliness is a major contributing factor to decreased quality of life in older people. Animal-assisted therapy has been liked to improvements in mood and overall wellbeing but, due to a number of reasons, a real pet may not be an option for many people, especially those living in care. Companion robots may be the key to providing a suitable alternative. In the past, some of these robotic pets were prohibitively expensive and well out of the financial reach of most people. Now, several large firms are working on new models that are both realistic and affordable, with focus on realistic behaviours. Whilst robotic pets should not be seen as a replacement for human interaction, they can be a useful aid in increasing social engagement and easing loneliness.
https://www.nbcnews.com/mach/science/why-robotic-pets-dementia-care-may-be-next-big-thing-ncna990166