The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin in Orlando Florida was the host for the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society on November 18-22, 2015. The following Duke faculty and fellows gave papers or posters there.

Connie Bales presented in a GRECC symposium on Obesity and Aging: A Bench- to-Bedside Perspective, a talk entitled “Impact of Diet-Induced Weight Loss on Physical Function in Frail, Obese Older Adults”. She discussed the role of geriatric obesity in functional frailty and reported new findings from her laboratory linking meal-based protein enhanced weight reduction with improved functional status in obese and frail older adults, as well as general conclusions from the current literature about diet and exercise interventions for obesity.

Connie Bales and Cathleen Colon-Emeric were co-authors on a poster presented by Melissa Batchelor-Murphy (Duke School of Nursing) on “Fidelity to Treatment: Implementing an Experimental Comparison of Dementia Hand Feeding Continued on page 4
Yi Zeng, Ph.D., Professor, Center for Study of Aging and Human Development and Geriatrics Division, School of Medicine, Duke University.

I earned my Ph.D. degree from Brussels Free University in the spring of 1986 with Ph.D. thesis research at Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute in 1984-1986, and conducted post-doc research at Princeton University in 1986-1987. I became an associate professor at Peking University in the fall of 1987 and was promoted to full professor in 1989 based on my peer-reviewed international publications. I joined the Duke Center for Demographic Studies as a Research Professor in Jan. 1999 and have been a tenured professor at Duke Aging Center and Geriatrics Division since June 2006, while I have kept my Professorship at Peking University in order to promote international collaborative research between American and Chinese scientists. I greatly appreciate the knowledge and research experiences I learned from Professors Frans Willekens, Ron Lesthaeghe, Ansley Coale, Jane Menken, James Vaupel, Ken Land, Linda George, Philip Morgan and Harvey Cohen and other colleagues during my studies and work in Europe and the U.S., in addition to many of my mentors and colleagues when I studied and worked in China.

To gain better understandings on how social, behavioral and genetic factors and their interactions may affect healthy aging, I led the Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Survey (CLHLS) and research since 1998, jointly funded by NIA/NIH, China Natural and Social Sciences Foundations and United Nations Fund for Population Activities. CLHLS has conducted 7 waves of in-depth surveys in 22 provinces (representing 85% of China’s total population) using internationally compatible questionnaires. Detailed longitudinal data on mental/physical health, cognition, and social participation at old ages and various associated factors were collected from a total of 96,805 face-to-face interviews with 16,557 centenarians, 23,081 nonagenarians, 25,842 octogenarians, 19,650 younger elders aged 65-79, and 11,675 adults aged 65-79. Data on mortality and degree/length of disability before death for 26,701 participants who died between waves were collected in interviews with a close family member of the deceased. The CLHLS has collected DNA samples from 24,693 participants, including 4,849 centenarians, 5,190 nonagenarians, 5,274 octogenarians, 4,770 aged 65-79, and 4,609 aged 40-64.

The CLHLS team has had outstanding peer-reviewed publications, including the paper on “Associations of Environmental Factors With Elderly Health and Mortality in China” by Yi Zeng, Danan Gu, Jama Purser, Helen

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EDITORIAL*
Strengthening Social Security

“Entitlement reform” is transparent code for cutting entitlement spending. Advocates for such “reform” point to the fact that Social Security and Medicare now account for about 40 percent of federal outlays, and use this fact to justify cutting these programs. Part of their strategy is to use the term “entitlements” to conflate self-supporting insurance programs such as Social Security and Medicare with anti-poverty or welfare programs, which are seen as wasteful gifts and therefore more vulnerable to cuts.

Rather than cutting Social Security benefits, supporters of Social Security advocate strengthening the program through the following types of increases:

- Increasing benefits to everyone receiving Social Security by 10 percent;
- Adoption of a cost of living adjustment based on spending by the elderly, such as the CPI-E;
- Improvement in the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefit.
- Enhancing benefits for disabled adult children.

It is true that such increases would be expensive. However they could be financed by uncapping the payroll tax, which is currently capped at just below $120,000, so that the 6 percent of earners, who escape taxation because of this cap, would have to pay an equal share of all their earnings just as everyone else does. Also a gradual small increase in the OASDI tax rate could take care of any remaining deficit.

Social Security has become the bedrock of retirement planning and disability insurance. Rather than cutting such vital programs, I believe we should work on ways to strengthen them.

*SCHMADER IN THE NEWS

Kenneth Schmader, MD, chief of geriatrics and Senior Fellow at our Center, was quoted in an article about the optimal time to get the shingles vaccine, in the November, 2015, issue of the AARP Bulletin. He explained that targeting the optimal time to get the vaccine is crucial because the risk of getting shingles increases with age.

“Most of us carry the varicella zoster virus, which causes chicken pox and herpes zoster, or shingles. Our immune systems keep it in check. But as people age, their immune systems weaken—a phenomenon known as immune senescence—and the virus can break out, causing shingles.”

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has concluded that waiting until age 60 to get the vaccine would prevent more cases and complications, including a condition called postherpetic neuralgia, which causes chronic and often intense burning pain from nerves damage by the virus.

Schmader was the Principal Investigator in a clinical trial here at Duke to establish the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine.
Techniques.” This poster presented results of studies of hand feeding techniques conducted in 12 skilled nursing homes in the southeastern United States. Study findings provide rationales for adjusting hand feeding techniques based on individual resident responses and ability.

Lisa Gwyther chaired the symposium, “Cognitive Aging—Hope and Challenges: Report from the Institute of Medicine.” The key messages of the report address the wide variability in the impact of cognitive aging. The symposium panel concluded that cognitive aging is more than decline in memory or processing speed and includes positive effects. With greater scientific understanding of the non-disease changes in cognition with age, the report concludes that much remains to be learned and there are opportunities for action at the levels of the individual, family, community, federal and state agencies and the private sector.

Gwyther also presented “People Like Me: A Case Study of Resilience in an Early-Stage Alzheimer’s Community,” at the GSA Fellows Symposium on Resilience. This presentation highlighted resilience factors embedded within the context of an intentional early-stage Alzheimer’s non-residential community with options for arts and activity programs and social connections. Findings were presented from seven cohorts of individuals with early-stage dementia and their care partners followed over three years. Implications suggested the value of creating intentional communities which may build and sustain resilience among individuals with dementia and care partners.

Gwyther was the discussant for the symposium “Helping Caregivers of People with Dementia Manage Medical Problems,” where she and Bobbi Matchar were part of the presentation, “Providing Guidance on Symptom Management to Caregivers of People with Dementia.” This symposium reported on an NINR-funded project to develop, implement, and evaluate an internet-based website (the Alzheimer’s Medical Advisor) to help family caregivers manage and make decisions about physical and behavioral signs and symptoms in their relatives living at home with Alzheimer’s or related diseases. Gwyther discussed the role of family caregivers as research consultants, and how their participation enhanced appropriate messaging which seemed to increase caregiver skills and self-efficacy in early trials of the website use.

Gwyther and Matchar, with Jessica Ruhle from the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke, presented a poster titled “Look and Lunch: Partnership Builds Community Art Experience for People With Dementia and Care Partners.” The Duke Family Support Program and the Nasher Museum of Art collaborated to offer Look & Lunch museum tours to individuals with early-stage dementia and their care partners. Participants are members of a support group for people with dementia and their care partners, and the Look & Lunch program provides opportunities for staying connected, hands-on arts experiences and social engagement in a non-stigmatizing, non-clinical venue.

Nathan Boucher presented a paper on “End of Life Decisions, Advance Planning, and Culture.” His recommendations for Community Members: empower awareness of EOL issues, engage providers regarding cultural needs, and clarification of advance care planning (ACP) function. Providers: engage patients to enhance culturally-responsive care, clarify ACP function, and ask patients about preference for roles of family and God in decisions.

Katherine King, Gerda Fillenbaum, and Harvey Cohen presented in a symposium on “Morbidity, Mortality, and Lifespan: The Role of Environmental Exposures.”

Katherine Ramos presented a poster on “Psychometric Properties of Worry/Anxiety Measures in an Urban, Racially Diverse, Underserved Sample of Older Adults.” She was also the first author of a poster on Vida Calma: Spanish Adapted CBT Intervention for Spanish Elder with GAD.

Kathryn Starr, Carl Pieper, Melissa Orenduff, Shelley McDonald, and Connie Bales presented a poster on “Improved Function with Enhanced Protein Intake: Weight Reduction in Frail, Obese Older Adults.” They found that, compared to a control diet, a weight loss diet with enhanced protein intake achieves a superior gain in functional status, supporting recent suggestions that older adults may benefit from a higher and more balanced protein intake than is typically recommended and consumed.

Keith Whitfield and Deborah Gold reported that they had raised $94,685 in support of the “Mentoring Effect” project.

Keith Whitfield was presented The Minority Issues in Gerontology Committee Outstanding Mentorship Award, which recognizes individuals who have exemplified outstanding commitment and dedication to mentoring minority researchers in the field of aging.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS*
Are older workers less productive?

Older worker to younger worker: “You’re not supposed to smoke while working.”
Younger worker: “Who says I’m working?”

Most older workers can be as productive as younger workers. Despite declines in perception and reaction speed among the general aged population, studies of employed older workers under actual working conditions generally show that they perform as well as, if not better than younger workers. When speed and accuracy of movement are important to the job, some studies do show declines with age. However, intellectual ability, on which much of work performance depends, does not decline substantially until the 80s in most individuals. Also consistency of output tends to increase with age, and older workers have less job turnover, fewer accidents, and less absenteeism than others.

*Adapted from Palmore, Older Can Be Bolder, (Amazon, 2011).

FEATURED RESEARCHER: Yi Zeng, Ph.D., continued

Hoenig and Nicholas Christakis, which won the American Journal of Public Health award in 2012 for the best paper of the year. As of 12/10/2015 and according to incomplete statistics, 2088 scholars had requested/obtained CLHLS datasets, which has resulted in publications of 9 books, 212 peer-reviewed articles in English, 287 peer-reviewed articles in Chinese, 28 Ph.D. theses and 47 MA theses.

I would like to use this opportunity to sincerely thank all of the CLHLS voluntary participants, trained interviewers, and the China CDC who helped us to conduct the CLHLS field survey, biomarkers collections, and home-based health exams by the medical doctors and my colleagues at Peking University and Duke University, as well as the funding agencies who provided support to this large study.

I, Ken Land, Danan Gu and Zhenglian Wang published our book titled “Household and Living Arrangement Projections: The Extended Cohort-Component Method and Applications to the U.S. and China” in 2014 by the Springer Scientific Publisher. This book presents an innovative demographic method that helps to make detailed household, living arrangement and population projections at the national, sub-national or small area levels, and features applications in the United States and China to demographic, social, economic, and business research/policy analysis, including projections on elderly living arrangements, disability status, care needs and costs.

I have enjoyed very much the outstanding academic research environment at the Duke Aging Center and Geriatrics Division and wish to continue to make useful contributions to promote the productive international collaborations of healthy aging studies between faculties, post-docs and students from Duke University, Peking University and other involved Chinese institutions in the coming years.

Belsky Article Ranked #4 Top Story

The article by Dan Belsky, et al., on Quantification of Biological Aging in Young Adults* was ranked as #4 by Science News in their list of top stories in 2015. Harvey Cohen and several other Center faculty were coauthors. For more information, see our Fall, 2015, issue, page 5.

COMING EVENTS


March 31-April 3: 37th Annual Meeting of the Southern Gerontological Society at Charlottesville, VA. Contact Ferguson at 866-920-4660.

May 19-21: American Geriatrics Society Annual Meeting at Long Beach, CA. Contact: www.americangeriatrics.org/annual_meeting.

IN THE NEWS

Murali Doraiswamy, MD is coauthor of an article published by the World Economic Forum on January 18, 2016 titled “Is this the key to fighting Alzheimer’s? The link to the article is http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/could-an-xprize-help-the-fight-against-alzheimer-s.

Lisa Gwyther, MSW, is the subject of an article titled, “Tar Heel: Lisa Gwyther is a one-woman support team for families dealing with Alzheimer’s?” that appeared in the January 16, 2016 News and Observer.