Last month Duke acknowledged my forty years of service to the Duke Center for Aging and Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. The Duke Family Support Program’s Caregiver newsletter and its Durham Evening Support Group qualify for about the same number of service years.

Our six-year old Early-Stage & Beyond Community set a new bar for programming under the visionary leadership of Bobbi Matchar, MSW, MHA in collaboration with our loyal community partner organizations. Memory Makers, the core entry point for all new programs, welcomes its 17th educational support group.

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Lisa P. Gwyther (second from left) and program staff
EDITORIAL

Time To Fix Fiscal Social Security*

Alarm bells are ringing about “Social Security’s Fiscal Woes” because the annual report from the trustees of Social Security and Medicare shows that both programs are “racing toward the brick wall of insolvency”. Social security will spend more money this year than it takes in for the first time since 1983. Without changes, the Social Security Trust fund is now expected to be depleted by 2034. Medicare’s Hospital Insurance Trust Fund (Medicare Part A) is projected to run out of money by 2026.

One simple fix would be to remove the cap on payroll taxes (currently set at $128,400). This would not raise taxes for most people – just on the affluent who can most afford it. This cap is strange tax policy anyway: it eliminates taxes on those who least need tax relief. This is regressive taxation at its worse.

Another fix would be to allow more young immigrants into our country, which would increase revenues of Social Security and Medicare. We could also tweak some benefits without hurting most beneficiaries.

Whatever the fix, the time to do it is now, before the trust funds begin to run out of money.

*The opinions in this editorial are those of the editor and do not necessarily reflect Center on Aging policy.

Commitment, Experience & Fresh Ideas: A New Leader continued

this fall; and What’s Next, Kinship support groups and Booster Club events are firmly established.

Bobbi’s foresight and broad experience created and expanded the reach of our Triangle-Area Monthly E-newsletter over the last three years. She revamped our communications and solidified our four-year-old series of monthly programs with Duke’s Nasher Art Museum Reflections Program. The Alphas’ monthly Saturday lunches and spontaneous gatherings thrive with her steady presence after six years.

Three anonymous gifts totaling 3.1 million dollars and many new generous donors assure individuals living with cognitive decline and their families will have access to our lessons learned and a recently doubled team of Duke Family Support Program social workers. It is time for a new team leader.

Our team, including myself and the invaluable Janeli McNeal, MSW and Natalie Leary, MSW, LCSWA, is thrilled that Bobbi Matchar, MSW, MHA has become the new Director of the Duke Family Support Program. We are seamlessly ready to roll with Bobbi’s innovations, strategizing, experience, unsurpassed knowledge base and commitment.

Some say “Change is Good – you do it.” I am eager to follow Bobbi’s lead as our program continues to focus on changing for the better the lived experience of people challenged by memory and thinking disorders. So look for me, just not as “Director”, as we commit to reach more individuals and families in meaningful ways in the years ahead.

SLOGAN FOR THE DAY:

You are never too old, and it’s never too late.
I am a Geriatrician Endocrinologist who has spent a career trying to better understand two metabolic bone diseases: Paget Disease of bone and osteoporosis. Both of these disorders increase in prevalence with aging. Equally important, these disorders are associated with significant functional impairments.

Thirty years ago, few people were interested in Paget Disease of bone, a disease of abnormal bone remodeling in which bones become enlarged, deformed, and painful, leading to pain and functional impairments. Although therapies were available, many patients were not treated and were willing to be studied. Three colleagues, Deborah Gold, PhD, a sociologist, Kathy Shipp, PT, PhD, a physical therapist, and Carl Pieper, PhD, a biostatistician, began a series of studies which demonstrated the pain and impaired quality of life these patients had. We worked together to develop measures to demonstrate and measure impairments in gait when the disease affected the bones of the leg, pelvis, and spine. About 25 years ago, a class of drugs known as bisphosphonates were being developed to treat osteoporosis. They were also effective in treating Paget Disease. One pharmaceutical company with an intravenous bisphosphonate, zoledronic acid, approached us to ask if we would help them design a clinical trial to test their drug’s efficacy in treating Paget Disease. The drug, approved by the FDA in 2007, was successful in reducing pain and was the first bisphosphonate to improve quality of life in affected patients.

While our group was working with Paget Disease of bone patients, Dr. Gold showed that osteoporosis, specifically vertebral fractures, impaired women’s quality of life, as their body shape changed from their spine fractures. As a group we worked to develop measures to show how these spine fractures impaired back strength. Dr. Shipp developed and modified existing exercises to help with strengthening spine muscles, improve posture and help reduce pain. With an NIH grant Dr. Gold received, we tested whether an intervention of specific exercises and sessions to improve quality of life would help women with vertebral fracture in eight large Continuing Care Retirement Communities, and could improve back strength and quality of life measures. The trial was successful and some of the exercises that we tested are recommended for patients with vertebral fractures by the National Osteoporosis Foundation.

In 1996 a Department of Medicine Resident, Cathleen Colon-Emeric MD, asked if we could work together to study osteoporosis in men. One of our first collaborative efforts discovered that men with low trauma hip fractures had a remarkable rate of subsequent fracture: 18%, in the two years after the successful surgical fracture repair. We knew that two companies were developing bisphosphonates that could be given intravenously and had therapeutic effects for up to twelve months. With our colleague Carl Pieper, PhD, we designed a clinical trial that would test whether such a drug would reduce the rate of subsequent fractures after a hip fracture. Novartis Pharmaceutical Corporation agreed to conduct such a trial. With exceptional support from the Duke Clinical Research Institute the trial was completed after
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS*
What causes Parkinson’s Disease?

There are three main types of Parkinson’s Disease: post encephalitic, arteriosclerotic, and idiopathic. Post encephalitic Parkinson’s is caused by a history of encephalitis lethargica. Arteriosclerotic Parkinson’s is caused by multi-infarcts in the brain. About 85% of Parkinson patients have idiopathic causes – which simply means the causes are unknown.

Alzheimer’s inevitable involves dementia while Parkinson patients may escape this. On the other hand, Parkinson patients usually suffer years of tremors, rigidity, and eventual loss of ability to respond at all.

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

FEATURED RESEARCHER: Kenneth Lyles, MD continued

6 years. It showed that zoledronic acid given within 90 days of repair of a hip fracture reduced the subsequent rate of fractures by 35%. This was one of two clinical trials that led to FDA approval of zoledronic acid as a therapy for osteoporosis.

One unanticipated finding of the hip fracture treatment trial was a 28% reduction in all-cause mortality, a striking finding, since 15-25% of people with a hip fracture die within 12 months of their fracture. Other studies have documented that this positive effect on mortality is observed with other nitrogen-containing bisphosphonates: alendronate and risedronate. There is growing interest in understanding why such drugs have a promising non-skeletal effect.

One of my more recent efforts has been to work with colleagues Cathleen Colon-Emeric, and Richard Lee, MD, MPH to find ways to improve the use of effective osteoporosis medications since there remain unwarranted concerns about side effects of these drugs and this fear prevents their use by patients who would clearly benefit. Finally, with colleagues at the University of California, San Francisco, University of Pittsburg, and Duke University, we hope to receive NIH funding for a trial to treat patients over 65 years of age with Parkinson’s Disease with zoledronic acid, given in their homes. We postulate that this therapy will reduce the 12-16% annual fracture rate in older affected patients.

In conclusion, I know that I have been fortunate to work as a member of the Duke University Aging Center, the Geriatrics Division, and Durham VA Medical Center because of my productive relationships with bright and creative collaborators.

*Kenneth Lyles, MD, is a consultant for Health Decisions in Durham, NC; on the Board of Trustees of the National Osteoporosis Foundation; Cofounder and Equity Owner of BisCardia, Inc.; and inventor or co-inventor of 4 patents using zoledronic acid.
Recent Publications

The following are recent publications of our faculty and fellows that are related to gerontology or geriatrics.


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Recent Publications

- Bobbi G. Matchar, Lisa P. Gwyther, Elizabeth Galik, & Barbara Resnick
- Building Resilience in Persons with Early-Stage Dementia and Their Care Partners.
Recent Publications


COMING EVENTS


The Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development 3rd Annual Research and Education Retreat will be held on Friday, November 30, 2018 from 12:00–5:00pm in the Trent Semans Building, Great Hall - Lower Level, O. Please see the Center’s website for more details. https://sites.duke.edu/centerforaging/

May 1-4, 2019: Annual Scientific Meeting of the American Geriatrics Society in Portland, OR. Contact 212-308-1414 or nlundebjerg@americangeriatricsociety.org.

November 13-17, 2019: Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society (including AGHE meeting). Austin, TX. Contact: Membership@geron.org.