Welcome to the first issue of the Program for Positive Aging Newsletter!

We plan to share our news and happenings with you twice per year. For more regular and timely updates, please visit our website (www.programforpositiveaging.org) and our “lighter side of later-life” Facebook page.

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What is the Program for Positive Aging (PPA)?

In 2009, we embraced the idea of developing a multidisciplinary program to improve emotional wellness in later life, and the PPA was born! Our program is interlinked with the Section of Geriatric Psychiatry, and was made possible through the collaboration and support of the U-M Department of Psychiatry, the Geriatrics Center and the Medical School.

The thought was simple: emerging research shows us that, to an even greater extent than genetics and lifestyle, the key to positive or successful aging is mindset or emotional wellness. While disease and disability are often thought of as natural outgrowths of aging, aging well can be accomplished—even in the face of challenges. Key components of positive aging include the ability to be resilient and adaptable, while maximizing the benefits of accumulated wisdom and experience.

The aging of American and world populations holds many profound consequences. The recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) report illustrates the growing mental health care needs resulting from this demographic shift. Nearly one in five older adults in America – 6 to 8 million seniors – experience one or more mental health conditions. The IOM reports “depressive disorders and dementia-related behavioral and psychiatric symptoms are the most prevalent.” Worldwide, it is estimated that in 2010 there were 35.6 million people living with dementia, with 7.7 million new cases each year. Unfortunately, our healthcare systems are currently ill-equipped to provide the amount and types of skilled care that older adults will require as our population continues to age. No single approach will alleviate these issues, so our field must increase specialized training to both professional and informal care providers (including family caregivers).

The PPA seeks to partner with our growing over-60 population, their families, and professional care providers to address both the emotional health challenges of later life and to positively enhance the aging experience. The PPA’s mission is accomplished via efforts on four fronts: clinical care, research, education, and community outreach. We seek to have a significant impact by adding “life to years” instead of just “years to life”.

In this inaugural issue, we hope to give you a flavor for the activities the PPA is engaged in, and look forward to sharing new endeavors with you in future editions.

Helen C. Kales, MD
Director of the Program for Positive Aging
Heba Gad, MB, BCh
Dr. Gad grew up between Kuwait and Egypt. She attended medical school at Ain Sham University in Egypt, and completed general psychiatry residency at the University of Michigan. Dr. Gad is interested in mood and anxiety disorders, and has a special interest in sexual health. During her fellowship, she completed the University of Michigan Sexual Health Certificate Program within the School of Social Work, to apply to her work with the geriatric population. Additionally, with PPA support, she was able to complete a research project (“Sex is Not Just for the Young”) that examined the extent to which providers address older adults’ sexual concerns during clinic visits. Dr. Gad will join the faculty of The Geisel School of Medicine-Dartmouth as an academic geriatric psychiatrist. Her clinical role will include caring for older adults in general and memory disorder clinics, consulting in a primary care clinic and providing supervision to residents and fellows on nursing home rotations. Dr. Gad will actively participate in teaching residents and research opportunities.

Jan Taliga, MD
Dr. Taliga was born and raised in Slovakia. He completed his medical degree at Comenius University, also in Slovakia, along with two years of Geology study as well. Jan graduated from the general psychiatry residency program at the Wayne State University, Department of Psychiatry. Jan is married and has two amazing sons and a rescue dog, Cajka. Jan and his family live in Windsor, ON, Canada. Dr. Taliga has accepted a position in Windsor, Ontario, dividing work between a private practice, and the outpatient service in the Developmental Disorders Dual Diagnosis Clinic at the Windsor Regional Hospital, with a focus on adult and older patients with Autism. In addition, he has accepted an adjunct faculty position with the University of Western Ontario, to teach medical students during their psychiatry rotation.

Goodbye to 2012 Geriatric Psychiatry Fellows

Hello to 2013 Geriatric Psychiatry Fellows

Jenny Alkema, MD
Dr. Alkema graduated from the University of Michigan Medical School in 2009. She continued her postgraduate medical education in psychiatry residency training at U-M, and will join the University of Michigan’s Geriatric Psychiatry Fellowship this July. Dr. Alkema has a longstanding interest in geriatric psychiatry. In recognition of her interest in the field, and her aptitude, she was selected as a 2013 Geriatric Mental Health Foundation Scholar (receiving membership in the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry; travel support to attend the 2013 AAGP meeting, and individual mentorship). Most recently, she received the “Military Veterans Patient Advocacy Award.” Dr. Alkema has distinguished herself as a medical student and resident, and we look forward to her bringing her considerable talents to the field of geriatric psychiatry.

Iquo Nafiu, MD
Dr. Nafiu graduated from the University of Ibadan Medical School, in Nigeria, in 1994. She continued her clinical psychiatry training in England, where she was first introduced to the field of geriatric psychiatry. Dr. Nafiu then immigrated to the United States, and she joined the University of Michigan psychiatry residency program in July 2009. Her international clinical experience and training gives her a broad range of experience in the field of medicine. Her longstanding interest in elderly patients is captured best by Dr. Nafiu herself, “Geriatrics gives me so much joy. It’s the care of the elderly that I enjoy and find most rewarding.” During her residency, Dr. Nafiu began work on a research project with Frederic C. Blow PhD in the area of substance abuse and the elderly that will be continued during her fellowship.

In November, Drs. Gad and Taliga became Board certified in General Psychiatry
Congratulations to PPA faculty members Dr. Susan Duffy (top left) and Dr. Laurie Boore (top right) on becoming board certified in Geriatric Psychiatry through the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. Our faculty has one of the largest concentrations of board certified Geriatric Psychiatrists in the United States. This certification entails expertise in prevention, evaluation, diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders in the elderly, and improvement of psychiatric care for healthy and ill elderly patients.

Hats off to Dr. David Belmonte (left) for his recent appointment as Director of Medical Student Education for the U-M Department of Psychiatry.

Congratulations to Our Faculty
Recent Promotions

Congratulations to Dr. Helen C. Kales, Director of the Program for Positive Aging, on her promotion to Professor with tenure

Congratulations to Dr. Susan M. Maixner, on her promotion to Clinical Associate Professor and for becoming board certified in Hospice and Palliative Medicine

Congratulations to Kara B. Zivin, Ph.D., on her promotion to Associate Professor with tenure

Welcoming New Faculty

Dr. Donovan Maust will be joining the geriatric psychiatry section and the PPA in July as an Assistant Professor. He is coming to us from the University of Pennsylvania where he completed a geriatric psychiatry fellowship. Dr. Maust will be working in the UM Geriatric Psychiatry Clinic, as well as on research to improve mental health outcomes for older adults with mentorship from Drs. Kales and Blow.

Welcome Dr. Maust!
In January 2013, our Director, Dr. Helen Kales, and her collaborator, Dr. Daniel Weintraub, were awarded new research funding from the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Services Research and Development Service. Dr. Weintraub specializes in the treatment of Parkinson’s Disease (PD) at the Parkinson’s Disease Research, Education and Clinical Center (PADRECC) at the Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Medical Center. He is also an Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Neurology at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

This 3-year study, *Morbidity and Mortality Risks with Antipsychotic Use in Parkinson’s Disease*, will investigate medication-related risks associated with the treatment of PD, a chronic and degenerative movement disorder that occurs mostly during later life.

It is common for PD patients to also experience symptoms of dementia and psychosis; these symptoms can be some of the most difficult for veterans and their families to deal with. Antipsychotic medications (AP) are used to help control these symptoms, but they also can increase the chances of new medical problems and death.

These risks have been under-examined in patients with Parkinson’s disease (PD). Existing small treatment studies have not shown a clear benefit for AP use, yet up to half of PD patients are prescribed antipsychotic medications over the course of their illness.

Determining the risks associated with APs in PD will greatly inform, and possibly alter, both clinical practice and the course of future research, including providing knowledge of which patients may be most at risk for mortality with APs. In addition, our results may spur controlled research trials of medication discontinuation in PD psychosis management, and increased testing of different medication classes and behavioral management strategies that are not associated with increased morbidity.

The VA Healthcare system provides care for over 80,000 veterans with Parkinson’s disease, offering unmatched opportunities for large-scale studies of treatment practices and patient outcomes. The VA Healthcare environment provides a unique setting in which to evaluate further these patient safety risks that effect the growing population of older veterans. This study will offer VA clinicians a broader base from which to provide evidence-based care, and provide physicians with information to help them make the best treatment choices for their patients.

Other contributors to this work at the Ann Arbor VA Medical Center include Dr. Frederic C. Blow, Dr. Kara Zivin, Dr. Myra Kim and Dr. Claire Chiang. They are joined by Dr. Jayne Wilkinson, also of the PADRECC, and Dr. Connie Marras from the University of Toronto.

**Best of luck to our study team!**

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**Did you know...**

The VA Healthcare system provides care for over 80,000 veterans with Parkinson’s disease.
This past Fall, the PPA had the rare and wonderful privilege of seeing aging “through the eyes of a child.” We hosted the all-girls robotics team from Bloomfield Hills Middle School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. The girls and their coach Pam Varma met with Drs. Helen Kales and Sara Weisenbach as well as Anna Tolis, LMSW to learn more about how later-life mental health conditions like depression impact aging. Pam told us the girls became interested in later-life depression as a particular focus because of experiences with grandparents. This great group of 10-12 year-olds were working on a project for the First Lego League’s Senior Solutions Challenge (http://www.firstlegoleague.org/challenge/thechallenge). Teams developed ideas to improve the quality of life for seniors by helping them continue to be independent, engaged, and connected in their communities. It was fun to talk to this bright and curious group about the potential careers for women in science.

The PPA has started preparing for this year’s Walk to End Alzheimer’s. Last Fall, we were able to raise $1795 for this cause that is near and dear to our hearts. We hope to receive as much support as we did last year! Please consider donating or walking and visit our team page at: http://tinyurl.com/m89hb2r.

Also, look for our upcoming flower sale at the Rachel Upjohn Building. All proceeds will benefit the Alzheimer’s Association!
Our Director, Dr. Helen C. Kales, and her collaborator, Dr. Laura Gitlin, recently received funding from the National Institute of Nursing Research for a study to assist persons with dementia and their caregivers. Dr. Gitlin directs the Center for Innovative Care in Aging at The Johns Hopkins University (JHU). She is also a Professor in JHU’s Department of Community Public Health School of Nursing and Department of Psychiatry.

Many of us are familiar with the difficulties encountered by those with Alzheimer’s disease. A hallmark characteristic of dementia of all types, however, is disruptive changes in behavior. More so than memory and cognitive impairments, these behaviors are among the most complex, stressful and costly aspects of caring for people with dementia. These behavior changes are almost universal, occur throughout the disease progression, are associated with increased health care utilization and nursing home placement, as well as causing intense upset and burden to families.

There are no FDA approved medications to treat these behavioral symptoms, although it is common clinical practice to use psychotropic medications such as antipsychotics. However, these medications have limited efficacy, introduce risks of significant side effects and mortality, and often do not address the behaviors most problematic to families, making their routine first-line use a poor strategy.

Non-medication therapies have been proven to have significant benefits without the physical risks of medications. Families are in the forefront of managing behaviors at home, yet use of these therapies by families is limited due to the lack of tools, and specific knowledge and skills to implement.

Over the next three and a half years, through our study "An Innovative Caregiver Tool to Assess and Manage Behavioral Symptoms of Dementia", we will develop and test WeCare. This will be a customized, easy-to-use, web-based tool for family caregivers that enables them to better understand, assess, manage and track behavioral symptoms and their contributing factors (e.g., pain, sleep disturbance). It will also provide tailored strategies for in-home, non-pharmacologic behavior management.

The research is innovative in its involvement of key dementia stakeholders in the tool development process, use of state-of-the-science technology, and a tailored, algorithmic approach to detecting and monitoring behaviors and selecting non-pharmacologic solutions. WeCare has potential to improve caregiver skills and the care of individuals with dementia who currently do not receive optimal behavioral management.

This study arose from strong interdisciplinary and cross-university collaborations. U-M co-investigators include Dr. Laurence An and his team at the Center for Health Communications Research, Dr. Laura Struble from the School of Nursing, Dr. Daphne Watkins from the School of Social Work, and Dr. Myra Kim from Biostatistics. At JHU, Dr. Constantine Lyketsos and Dr. Quincy Samus complement the team. We also thank in advance the many staff and participant volunteers who will help make this important work a success!
We’ve been wanting to get out and talk to people who embody positive aging—and bring their stories to you. And...we’ve met the perfect person to help us do just that! **Barbara Cherem, PhD** will be interviewing some fantastic individuals about their perspective on growing older and best memories. You’ll be able to read these inspiring stories on our website (link below).

Dr. Cherem has conducted research on “What Sustains Learning in the Later Years?” through surveying and interviewing Ann Arbor area seniors since 2008. Dr. Cherem has also published on this topic. The results of her research have also been shared with the Adult Learning Institute and Elderwise, and she has commonly presented on topics related to seniors such as: *Images of Aging*, and *Happiness and Mental Alertness*.

Dr. Cherem retired from the University of Michigan – Flint in 2012 but continues to teach courses part-time and lives in Ann Arbor with her husband, Gabe, and their three pets--- Fred, Sugar and Spice. They have two grown children, also Michiganders.

What we’ll be asking…

*What is your favorite simple pleasure?*

*How was your life different than what you imagined?*

*What is the most valuable lifestyle change you have made/habit you have?*

*Who or what has been the biggest influence of your life? What lessons did they/it teach you?*

Check out our website: www.programforpositiveaging.org

www.facebook.com/programforpositiveaging

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SOMETHING TO WATCH FOR

**Interviews with Positive Agers**
If you know someone who would like to be added to the mailing list for the PPA Newsletter, please send us an email at: programforpositiveaging@med.umich.edu

The story of Athena...

We hope you like our PPA mascot, Athena the owl, as much as we do. In Greek mythology, Athena is the goddess of wisdom, courage and inspiration, among other good things.

Athena is frequently depicted with an owl perched on her hand. Consequently, the owl became a sort of Athenian mascot—and now she’s ours!