

Annual Report 2007-2008

Background:

The Regional Institute on Aging (RIA) is a virtual research organization, established by Wichita State University (WSU), to serve the citizens of metropolitan Wichita, the adjacent counties, the state of Kansas, and, eventually, the surrounding Midwestern states. In 5 to 7 years, the WSU RIA will be a self supporting, prevention focused, well recognized scientific innovator.

The U. S. is an aging society. Nonetheless, the American social landscape is poorly prepared to address this population change (in spite of the fact that the trend was forecast decades ago). The political, health and social service, workforce and educational systems are being, and will continue to be, impacted in ways that are not yet fully appreciated. It is reasonably certain that a new set of challenges will emerge, and new approaches will be required to address the many changes brought by this ongoing population shift.

While the growth of the older segments of our population is rapid, many commentators and policy makers focus only on the thorny issues raised by these changes. However, WSU RIA recognizes that older people hold a treasure trove of experiences and knowledge that can be brought to bear on the issues in an aging society.

Kansas is an increasingly diverse state (1); is medically underserved (2); is slightly older and aging more rapidly than much of the U.S. (3); has a lower per capita income than the national average (4); has more frontier counties, with fewer than seven residents per square mile, than it did in 1890 (5). The population of Kansas is concentrating in urban areas and small to mid-sized towns and cities with an aging, and often poorer population, remaining in the rural and frontier counties.

In contrast, Wichita is typical of many medium sized urban areas with quick access to adjacent rural communities, and is, therefore, a particularly attractive research laboratory. Many of the demographics characterizing Wichita and the surrounding area allow applications developed here to be replicated and transported to other communities and states, both urban and rural.

Vision and Mission Statement:

Vision:

Advance research to improve the health and well being of older adults in Kansas and the nation.

Mission:

- > Facilitate and support aging research with an emphasis on prevention, the promotion of maximal functional capacity and the maintenance of independence.
- > Encourage the dissemination, translation and application of research based information.
- > Convene local, regional and national conferences and workshops.
- > Develop scientific expertise and engage investigators new to aging research.

Organizational Profile and History:

The WSU RIA serves as an intellectual and scientific organizer for the university and its partners to facilitate, leverage, and expand ongoing research work. The WSU RIA is an electronically linked consortium of investigators and organizations united by the vision of advancing research to enhance the lives of older adults. The WSU RIA is administratively headquartered in the Office of Research Administration, Academic Affairs and Research, and is co-sponsored by Larksfield Place Retirement Community.

For more than a decade, WSU administrators and investigators have recognized the need for the expansion of knowledge on aging. Faculty and staff from across the academic colleges have done substantive aging-related research in a variety of scientific disciplines for many years. The

scope of this research encompasses all six colleges and both graduate and undergraduate components. The interdisciplinary nature of the issues and the desire to work together already exist at the university, providing synergy and a collaborative potential not often found in academic settings.

In 2003-04, a group of scholars, led by Dr. James Rhatigan in partnership with Drs. Philip Gaunt and Charles Fox, explored the desirability of folding the activities into a more formal framework that would expand, coordinate and further develop these activities.

Through its ongoing activities, the university has established an excellent network of partners both locally and throughout the state, including the Kansas Department on Aging, Central Plains Area Agency on Aging, Kansas Life Project, Cerebral Palsy Research Foundation, Kansas Association of Senior Centers, Senior Services, Inc., Kansas Adult Care Executives, Kansas Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, and the Larksfield Place Retirement Community.

In 2006, the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research, Gary L. Miller, Ph.D., and Associate Vice President for Research, J. David McDonald, Ph.D., joined the efforts and provided the financial support, along with the Larksfield Place Retirement Community, to establish the Regional Institute on Aging. Teresa S. Radebaugh, Sc.D., was named the first Director.

Core Values:

Use research as an ethical solution to issues and questions.

Bridge the gap between research and practice.

Respect the diversity of older adults.

Value the experience and potential of older adults.

Connect to community organizations to enhance the work of all.

Launch:

The RIA was publicly announced on April 4, 2007 at a ceremony held at the Eugene M. Hughes Metropolitan Complex that included a presentation of 26 scientific posters by WSU faculty investigators. The posters demonstrated the vitality aging research work at WSU and were subsequently displayed at Larksfield Place Retirement Community and in the Ablah Library.

Programs and Accomplishments:

In the first year, the Regional Institute on Aging initiated programs to enhance aging research and highlight issues about older adults. Activities include:

Graduate Research Assistantship Program:

The WSU Graduate School and the Regional Institute on Aging developed a competitive program to provide support to faculty investigators to enhance their programs of research in aging. While many tools are required to support and expand a research program, assistance of well trained graduate students is an important one. This program provides support for faculty members in the pursuit of their research and in depth research experience for graduate students. Assistantships were awarded to: George R. Bousfield, Ph.D., Department of Biological Sciences; Alex Chaparro, Ph.D., Department of Psychology; LaDonna S. Hale, PharmD., Department of Physician Assistant; Michael J. Jorgensen, Ph.D., Department of Industrial and Manufacturing Engineering; and Bin Shuai, Ph.D., Department of Biological Sciences.

Aging in Focus Lecture Series:

The Fairmount College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, College of Health Professions, College of Education, College of Engineering and the Regional Institute on Aging collaborated to support a

university evening lecture series, Aging in Focus, to explore the conditions and situations that most commonly affect older adults using an integrated, inter-disciplinary perspective. The population of older adults in the U.S. continues to grow, with those age 85 years and over, the oldest-old, growing most rapidly. This population change brings new challenges to health care providers, educators and scientists who seek to understand the experiences of adults in the later decades of life. The quarterly Aging in Focus series began in October 2007. WSU faculty, graduate and undergraduate students with scholarly, research or clinical interests in older adults attend. The lectures were advertised in the Wichita metropolitan area with faculty of local colleges and universities specifically targeted. The lecturers and topics were:

October 4, 2007--- Aging in Indian Country: The Story of Diabetes Mellitus by Drs. J. Neil and L. Carson Henderson, Professor and Assistant Research Professor, Department of Health Promotion Sciences, College of Public Health, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.

December 6, 2007 Cloudy skies ahead? Aging and retirement in Kansas by L szl J. Kulcs r, PhD., Assistant Professor of Sociology and Director, Kansas Population Center, Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work, Kansas State University

February 5, 2008 I Can Hear You, but I Can t Understand A Thing You Are Saying! by Raymond H. Hull, Ph.D., FASHA, FAAA, Professor, Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, and Director, Center for Research in Communicative Sciences and Disorders, Wichita State University

April 10, 2008 Promoting Physical Activity: How to be Active for Life,"

by Marcia Ory, Ph.D., MPH, Professor, Texas A&M School of Rural Public Health. Dr. Ory was unable to reach Wichita because of the American Airlines flight disruptions, and the lecture was cancelled.

The series will resume in the fall 2008.

Gridley-Hoover Pilot Research Program:

The Regional Institute on Aging, through the generous support of Mr. Curt Gridley and Ms. Tracy Hoover, announced the Gridley-Hoover Pilot Research Program for innovative, collaborative research in aging. The purpose of the pilot research program is to provide investigators with significant short-term funding to collect preliminary data to underpin hypothesis-driven research grant applications (e.g., NIH RO1s) in human aging research. Pilot research funding is a vital but very-difficult-to-obtain 'ingredient' for the expansion of research work. Without pilot or preliminary data, it is almost impossible for scientists to submit a successful application to the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation or any other major research funding group. The availability of this significant pilot research program will speed the expansion of aging research at WSU and give the faculty a competitive edge.

All full time WSU faculty members were eligible to apply. Pilot research projects were funded up to \$20,000 for direct research and personnel costs for 12 months. Ten applications were received and reviewed.

The donors, Mr. Gridley and Ms. Hoover, met with Drs. Rhatigan, McDonald and Radebaugh on April 2 to discuss the development and management of the pilot project program and to decide on the applications to fund. After careful consideration, the donors funded the following pilot research projects:

Promoting Health Independence: Rural Kansas Seniors & Effective Health Promotion, Deborah Ballard-Reisch, Ph.D.

Assessment of Physical Health Concerns of Older Adults with Psychiatric Disabilities, Greg Meissen, Ph.D.

A Social Cognitive Sexual Counseling Intervention after Myocardial Infarction, Elaine E. Steinke, Ph.D., RN

The awardees were announced in WSU Today on April 4, 2008, the one year anniversary of the Institute.

Work Group on Falls, Gait Disorders and Fractures in Older Adults:

WSU has faculty members with significant scientific experience in the research areas of falls, gait disorders and fractures in older adults. A major goal of the Regional Institute on Aging is to expand the ongoing research and enhance the likelihood of funding for research grant applications. The Work Group on Falls, Gait Disorders and Fractures in Older Adults was designed to enhance and support research capability in the broad arena of falls and gait disorders. The members of the Falls Work Group include Drs. LaDonna Hale, Nicole Rogers, Michael Rogers, Candy Bahner, Deborah Ballard Reisch and Betty Elder. The Work Group is preparing a plan for a community based intervention, building upon local community resources, to reduce falls and the resulting morbidity and mortality. The program, Falling Less in Kansas (Falling LinKS), is rooted in the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Council on Aging. The Work Group submitted an application to fund the initial focus group and tool kit development work. The Work Group will submit another application in September 2008 to fund the pilot test.

Conference---Aging on the Plains:

It has been estimated that by 2030, there will be approximately 68 million people 65 years of age or older in the US. This population group, the baby boomers, is not a homogenous group. They will be the most, or one of the most, heterogeneous groups of older adults seen in any nation, ever. They will be defined by many characteristics including their varied views on aging, and on services for aging and ill people. Their views will be influenced by country of origin, ethnicity, family structure and religious tradition. The group will also be diverse by culture, socio-economic status, and health status.

While it has been suggested that the baby boom cohort is healthier than previous cohorts, there are some points of concern. It has been reported that the baby boom cohort members became heavier earlier than the members of previous cohorts. Rates of disability in older adults have been declining, but this downward trend may be short lived as the prevalence of obesity in older adults continues to increase. Obesity is linked to a variety of diseases, conditions and to functional disability. Additionally, rates of disability and obesity are not likely to be uniform but are expected to concentrate in some cultural and socio-economic groups and in rural residents. This burgeoning population coupled with facility, workforce and economic limitations will require innovative paradigms to meet the projected service needs of this aging cohort and their families. The challenges presented by the aging baby boom cohort residing in rural areas and small towns in the central swath of the U.S. are particularly great and require a fundamental re-thinking of services and programs for older adults. (Aging Baby Boomers in the Central United States, T. Radebaugh, National Rural Health Association newsletter)

On September 24-26, 2008, the Wichita State University Regional Institute on Aging, with support from Larksfield Place Retirement Community, the Central Plains Geriatric Education Center at the University of Kansas Medical Center, and the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund will convene a major conference to (1) examine the challenges and the opportunities

presented by this population change and (2) develop novel paradigms of care and services to meet the projected needs of the baby boomers and their families.

Aging researchers, program and service administrators, nurses and social workers providing direct care, state legislators, county commissioners and the general public are all invited.

NIA Regional Meeting:

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) invited the Regional Institute on Aging to co-host a Directors Regional Meeting on Aging Research on March 11, 2008. The NIA supports a series of regional meetings in research and training for individuals new to aging research, as well as those underserved and underrepresented in aging research. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information on existing opportunities for research and training; offer hands on technical assistance in grant writing; provide advice on the design of new research opportunities; and suggest strategies for recruiting under-represented students and investigators to aging research. Approximately 70 people from Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas attended the all day meeting held in the Corbin Education Center.

New Programs under Consideration:

A Program to Advance Aging Research: A challenge for faculty is finding uncommitted time, in the face of teaching assignments, to engage in the planning and conduct of research. The goal of this program is to provide opportunities for faculty to secure substantial blocks of time to devote to research work.

The program will have two objectives (1) recovery of committed time and (2) support for uncommitted time. For the recovery of time committed to teaching, funds will be provided, for example, to purchase release time from course work during the academic year, or to hire Graduate Research Assistants to extend the investigator's efforts (while offering the students in-depth research experience).

Many WSU faculty members are on nine month contracts. Therefore, the second objective is to provide opportunities to secure significant summer research support. Several options will be offered since the needs of faculty in various departments and colleges differ. The options include summer salary and research support funds to be used at WSU; support for work at other universities, or federal government laboratories, to acquire new research techniques or collaborate on projects with well established investigators; and short term (1 to 4 week) training support for attendance at courses or workshops, including registration, travel and lodging expenses.

The program will require a detailed proposal that is competitive, and offer a number of options designed to meet the varied needs of faculty across the campus.

Research Development Workshops: The easy questions in aging research were answered long ago. The research issues remaining are complex, often requiring multi-disciplinary scientific teams. The State of Kansas has a number of significant research resources and strengths that can be organized to address issues in aging, particularly focused on older adults residing in more rural and remote areas.

Research development workshops will be convened annually. The workshops will be led and hosted by WSU, and convened in partnership with the University of Kansas Gerontology Center and Kansas State University Center on Aging. Faculty with relevant research interests from all Kansas colleges and universities will be invited to attend.

Each workshop will address an important aging research issue. The workshop will explore the current research activities and scientific expertise of the participants, against the backdrop of the state of the science and the public health needs. The long range goal of the program of research

development workshops is be the preparation and submission of grant applications that include two or more collaborating colleges and universities.

References and Notes

1. Between 1990-2000, the Hispanic/Latino population of Kansas doubled. Kansas Health Initiative, Forum Brief, No. 7, January 2004.
 2. Bureau of Health Profession, Health Resources and Services Administration. Approximately 90 Kansas Counties are designated as medically underserved areas or medically underserved populations. <http://muafind.hrsa.gov/index.aspx>
 3. US Census Quick Facts, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/20000.html>
 4. Personal Income Per Capita in Constant (2000) Dollars/ 1 2004, <http://www.census.gov/statab/ranks/rank29.html> and <http://www.iowaworkforce.org/trends/percapita.html>
 5. Bit by Bit, Tiny, Morland, Kan., Fades Away, Peter T. Kilborn, New York Times, May 10, 2001.
- In 2004, 32 of the 105 Kansas counties had a population density of less than 6 persons per square mile. Kansas Department of Health and Environment.