

### Introduction

Dear colleagues, on behalf of the IGS I would in the first instance like to pay tribute to Prof Cillian Twomey for his leadership and achievements during his time as President of the IGS. In this time we have moved from the position where our activities consisted solely of an annual scientific meeting, and where our focus was almost exclusively that of health gerontology, to a wider portfolio of activities and broader membership, encompassing the four pillars of gerontology: social, psychological, health and biology. We have revised our constitution and committees to reflect this, and now also run an annual focussed seminar, biannual PhD study days, and publish both a journal and this newsletter. We are very grateful to Cillian for his energy, enthusiasm and vision, and the sciences of time ageing have benefited greatly from his presidency.

In this issue, we cover some of the major new initiatives in ageing research in Ireland, as highlighted at the special symposium at our 2007 Scientific meeting, and welcome the ferment of new projects and infrastructure in research, to which great credit must be given also to Atlantic Philanthropies.

We also welcome the development of the new Office for Older People, led by Minister for Older People, Maire Hocht TD, and directed by Noel Usher. We hope that this will also provide a major boost for the development of a society for all ages. The IGS has been a strong advocate for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, publishing it in full in the Irish Journal of Medical Science at the IGS meeting in 2003 in Tallaght. As yet, Ireland has not responded to these UN mandated principles ([www.unece.org/pau/age/Conferenceon-](http://www.unece.org/pau/age/Conferenceon-)

[Ageing\\_2007/country\\_reports.htm](http://www.unece.org/pau/age/Conferenceon-Ageing_2007/country_reports.htm)), and we hope that the Office for Older People will engage strongly with this important international initiative.

Our annual meeting this year takes place in Kilkenny on 3 and 4 October, and book early for what promises an stimulating and, as ever, sociable forum. A major initiative this year will be a dedicated session for invited papers in Social Gerontology on the Friday.

Ni neart go cur le cheile, and I look forward to working with the membership and the Executive Committee to advance the goal of society to promote high quality scientific research as an important foundation for policy and practice for Irish society.

Prof Des O'Neill  
President, IGS

### IGS Annual Scientific Meeting

The 2007 Scientific Meeting marked a change in venue to the impressive Croke Park conference center. Delegates enjoyed the beautiful setting and attentive service.

The meeting was opened by Prof Cillian Twomey in his final outing as IGS President. He brought our attention to the recent passing of Dr John Fleetwood, the pioneering founder member of the IGS. Despite the sad news however there was much to be proud of in the organisation of the meeting. There was a record number of abstract submissions, a fantastic new venue and several eminent speakers.

Prof C Kelly of Beaumont hospital gave a comprehensive update on the Management of Carotid Disease. Prof G McElvaney, also of Beaumont gave a Masterclass on Management of COPD in Older Adults. There was a very high quality of platform presentations, and there was a multidisciplinary representation as can always be expected at the IGS.

In the evening the Willie Bermingham Lecture was delivered by Prof Alan Walker of the University of Sheffield, on Active Ageing. He made a thought-provoking presentation that was highly enjoyable.

There was a small matter of an in-

ternational rugby match in the evening, and a supporters' camp was set up in the cosy dining area deep under Croke Park, a suitable venue to be watching it. A delicious dinner and the odd drink capped a wonderful evening.

Day two saw the introduction of Parallel sessions, with a Workshop on Neuropsychology running side by side with a session on Population Studies in Ireland. This novel structure allowed added choice.

The meeting closed with a summary by Prof Des O'Neill of the main points and current issues relevant to Geriatric Medicine in Ireland. After the presentation of awards, the presidency of the IGS was passed over to Prof O'Neill.



Prof Des O'Neill receiving the IGS Presidency from the outgoing President, Prof Cillian Twomey

#### Platform Presentations

*1st Place:* Aoife Ni Chorcain, Prevalence and Correlates of Psychotic Disorder and Psychotic Symptoms in Community Dwelling Elderly

*2nd Place:* Paul Cotter, 15 Years Later: Dramatic Change in Resuscitation Preferences of Older Adults

*Commended:* Jude Ryan, The Commensal Bacterium *Bifidobacterium Infantis* Modulates The Mucosal Immune Response to *Clostridium Difficile* by Attenuating the Secretion of the Chemokine CCL20

#### Poster Presentations:

*1st Place:* Colm Cunningham, Systemic Inflammation Superimposed on Chronic Neurodegeneration induces Acute Behavioural and Cognitive Changes and Accelerates Neurological Decline

*2nd Place:* Kevin McCarroll, Acute Hospital Readmission rates for Elderly following Discharge to Long-Term Care Facilities.

*Commended:* Patricia O'Sullivan, Development and Implementation of an OSCE to Teach and Provide Formative Feedback in Communication and Interpersonal Skills to Trainees in Geriatrics

# CARDI:

## Making a Difference with Ageing Research

In Ireland (North and South) we are living in a time of demographic change with an increasing number of older people and a reduction in birth rate. An ageing population is one of the success stories of modern times. However, this is not to underestimate that changing population demographics provide much-needed research opportunities in a wide variety of areas, not just health and social care but across a range of disciplines: engineering, technology, housing, transport, planning, economics, sociology and others. Decisions about the future of Ireland and its ageing population will be made on the best available information; therefore, it is key to ensure we bring forward the required evidence.

With this backdrop, the Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland (CARDI) has been recently established to provide a mechanism for greater collaboration among age researchers, for wider dissemination of ageing research information and to advance a research agenda relevant to the needs of older people in Ireland (North and South).

In supporting and strengthening the research agenda in Ireland, CARDI will operate at a strategic level and in an advisory capacity. A key focus will be to develop and work in partnership across sectors and disciplines, focusing on influencing the strategic direction of research relating to older people and ageing in Ireland to help address disadvantage. CARDI will not undertake research itself, however it can commission where appropriate.

CARDI has been strategically positioned around the following four areas:

Identifying and establishing ageing research priorities relevant to policy and practice in Ireland (North and South);

Promoting greater collaboration and cooperation on ageing research in order to build an ageing research community in Ireland (North and South);

Stimulating research in priority areas that can inform policy and practice relating to ageing and older people in Ireland (North and South);

Communicating strategic research issues on ageing to raise the profile of ageing research agenda in Ireland (North and South) and its role in informing policy and practice.

The first stage of our work has focused on developing an Ireland-wide directory of researchers, research interests and research projects relevant to ageing and older people. (If you haven't yet had the opportunity to complete and submit your details, please click on [www.cardi.ie](http://www.cardi.ie).) This information will be made available on line later this year when our website is launched. It will provide a useful way of finding out about the work of other researchers, research organisations/centres and new and emerging research fields relevant to ageing and older people.

The second stage of work will focus on facilitating discussion on the research priorities for Ireland (North and South). Inclusive cross sectoral and cross discipline consultations will help focus on the data, skills and knowledge needed to support pri-

orities to inform policy and practice now and in the future.

CARDI will follow up by creating opportunities to bring together the research community and relevant players so that those with skills and knowledge on ageing can focus on top priorities. It is increasingly being recognised that no single discipline can answer all the questions on ageing and therefore CARDI will promote greater collaboration and cooperation on ageing research as a means to build an ageing research community in Ireland.

To enhance applied areas of strategic importance, CARDI will support the development of multi-disciplinary research networks with a policy and practice focus and will stimulate the ageing research agenda through a specific research fund.

CARDI recognises the importance of enhanced communication mechanisms between researchers in ageing from academia, government, non-government and wider key stakeholders to help advance the implementation of knowledge and this will be an important and ever changing area of work.

This work has been made possible through funding by Atlantic Philanthropies, augmented by grants from the Department of Health and Children in Dublin and the Research and Development Office for Health and Social Care, Northern Ireland and hosting by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland.

CARDI will be officially launched later this year when we will present our strategy for the period 2008 – 2011. To mark this important occasion, in March Ministers from the Office of the First and Deputy First minister, Ian Paisley Junior MLA and Gerry Kelly MLA, will host a launch in the Long Gallery, Stormont, Belfast. Later, Minister of State for Older People, Máire Hoctor TD will host a similar launch in Farmleigh House, Dublin.

If you would like to find out more about CARDI please get in contact:

Dr. Roger O'Sullivan

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### **IGS Annual Scientific Meeting 2008**

We look forward to seeing everyone  
in Kilkenny this year.

Venue: Hotel Kilkenny, Kilkenny

**Friday 3rd to Saturday 4th October**

Information, Registration

& Accommodation details on

**[www.gerontology.ie](http://www.gerontology.ie)**

## The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA)

The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing is a major inter-institutional initiative led by Trinity College. It will provide comprehensive information on the health, social and economic circumstances of up to 10,000 Irish adults, aged 50 years and over and how these circumstances change over a 10 year period.

### What is its Relevance?

Ireland is facing a major demographic transformation over the next 20 years. By 2030, one in 5 Irish people will be 65 years or older. The greatest increase will occur in the over 80's. Ageing on this scale is an unprecedented phenomenon in Irish history. In stark contrast to the evident importance of ageing, there is an acute shortage of social, economic and health information on older persons in Ireland. The data from TILDA will help to fill this gap and will provide policy-makers in the fields of health, social care, pension planning and biotechnology with a unique knowledge base. TILDA is essential to underpin future planning and to ensure a 'healthy and happy' life span for the people of Ireland.

### TILDA's Mission

The basic mission of the TILDA project is to bring about a step change in the quality, quantity and prominence of information and research about ageing and older people in Ireland. This will add substantially to scientific knowledge about the ageing process in general and highlight the effects of Irish public policy on all domains of older people's lives. By providing robust, in-depth research the project will provide policy makers with the tools to help make Ireland "the best place in the world to grow old".

### TILDA's Key Strengths

- An inter-institutional, inter-disciplinary research team comprising some of the most eminent researchers in Ireland in the health, social and economic fields
- o Institutions involved are Dundalk Institute of Technology, Economic and Social Research Institute, National University of Ireland Galway, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Trinity College Dublin, University College Cork, University College Dublin and Waterford Institute of Technology.
- Large, representative sample to allow accurate analysis and substantial disaggregation of results
- High quality sampling, fieldwork and data processing to be carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute
- Longitudinal design focused on understanding processes and causation as well as providing point-in-time estimates
- Commitment to both high quality science and policy-relevant analysis
- Focus on linking with other national initiatives in the ageing field and on building genuine international comparability of methods and results

### Specific Objectives

1. To provide an integrated and representative database covering all the key domains of people's lives including health, income, living conditions, social contact, accommodation, environment and family circumstances. By establishing and nurturing real collaboration between experts in a range of disciplines, it will be possible for the first time to study in depth how these different domains relate to each other, and to locate the points at which policy interventions are most appropriate. This approach is essential in understanding the complex web of causation involving health, income and living standards.
2. To collect data this is longitudinal. This permits researchers to describe and understand the processes of change involved, which would not be possible with cross-sectional (point-in-time) data.
3. To provide comprehensive base-line data on older people.

The large, high quality sample will permit substantial disaggregation, so permitting researchers to study relatively small sub-groups in the population. The database will also provide norms in the sense of establishing what is typical or usual, with which special sub-groups (e.g. individuals suffering from a particular disease or disability) can be compared.

4. Link closely with and learn from the best international studies in the area such as The Health and Retirement Study in the USA (HRS), the English Longitudinal Study on Ageing (ELSA) and the Survey of Health and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). This is to ensure adoption of best practice and comparability of results.

5. To collaborate closely with other cutting edge research initiatives in Ireland.

### Data collection

Data collection will commence in 2008 and will combine both a structured interview (questionnaire) with a clinical assessment. The questionnaire will collect detailed information on all aspects of participants lives, including the economic dimension (pensions, employment, living standards etc.), health aspects (physical, cognitive, behavioural, mental, service needs and usage etc.) and social aspects (contact with friends and kin, formal and informal care, social participation etc.). Participants will be interviewed every two years. In addition, all participants will be invited to attend a detailed clinical assessment at baseline and every 4 years.

### Novel assessments planned for TILDA include:

1. Autonomic function (Phasic BP and Heart Rate Variability)
2. Multi-sensory integration (vision, hearing, proprioception)
3. Computerised Gait & Balance assessment
4. Extensive biomarkers including genetics, inflammatory markers, & urinary metabolomics
5. Macular Pigment Optical Density Testing for the early detection of age-related macular degeneration
6. Detailed cognitive & neuro-psychiatric battery including executive function, sustained attention, anxiety and depression

### Overall Impact

If TILDA is implemented successfully, it will significantly enhance knowledge of the ageing process and its multi-faceted consequences, especially but not exclusively in the Irish context. As a result, it will improve public policy as it affects all aspects of older people's lives and lead to improved quality of life for them. It will highlight the experiences and concerns of older people in the national discourse, thus giving them a stronger voice. It will bring out the substantial but unrecognised contribution older people already make to society and assess the potential for this contribution to grow. It will help to build capacity for multi-disciplinary ageing research in Ireland and permit the country to become a prime location to which international research on ageing will be attracted. These outcomes will emerge over the life-time of the project.

Dr Hilary Cronin and Prof Rose Anne Kenny

"HEALTH IN AGEING: ACHIEVEMENTS AND POTENTIAL OF LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH"  
29th and 30th May 2008, Royal Hospital Kilmainham.

This conference aims to broaden the knowledge base and expertise of researchers, clinicians and policy makers on the science of health, ageing and longevity. In order to achieve these objectives, TILDA has secured the participation of cutting-edge researchers and leaders of major longitudinal studies from the US and Europe. For instance, Dr. David Snowdon, Director of the Nun Study in the USA, will deliver a keynote lecture on 'The Future for Health in Ageing'. In addition, we expect this conference to help advance health research in Ireland, initiate national and international collaboration and raise the visibility of Irish research in ageing globally. Further information is available on [www.tilda.ie](http://www.tilda.ie).

## SHARE

The Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) is a multidisciplinary and cross-national database of micro data on health, socio-economic status and social and family networks of individuals aged 50 or over. Eleven countries contributed data to the SHARE baseline study in 2004, ranging from Scandinavia (Denmark and Sweden) through Central Europe (Austria, France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands) to the Mediterranean (Spain, Italy and Greece). Israel joined in 2005, and Ireland, together with the Czech Republic and Poland - joined SHARE in 2006. SHARE is one of the largest research infrastructures in economics and the social sciences financed by the European Commission and by national funding agencies (which for Ireland is the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences). It has also been identified by the European Commission as a strategically important piece of research infrastructure, one of only 6 'infrastructures' in the social sciences. The first wave of SHARE, collected in 2004/05, attracted more than 600 researchers and generated a host of scientific papers that demonstrate the value of SHARE as a research infrastructure. A second wave in 2006/07 has been collected and will be released soon, and a third wave is in preparation for 2008/09. SHARE provides free access to all researchers.

Fieldwork for the first Irish wave of SHARE, which interviewed some 1100 individuals from across the country using the Wave 1 survey to align with the core study, has just been completed and will soon be available from the SHARE website, [www.share-project.org](http://www.share-project.org). Data collected includes health variables (e.g. self-reported health, physical functioning, cognitive functioning, health behaviour, use of health care facilities), psychological variables (e.g. psychological health, well-being, life satisfaction), economic variables (current work activity, job characteristics, opportunities to work past retirement age, sources and composition of current income, wealth and consumption, housing, education), and social support variables (e.g. assistance within families, transfers of income and assets, social networks, volunteer activities).

SHARE is a critical study for Ireland and the Irish planning process. Ageing and demographic change will change our society in unprecedented ways. While the threat to the stability of our pension and health care systems has been discussed widely, many fundamental questions remain unanswered. We know little about changing employability of older workers; we know little about how households in their middle ages prepare for older age through saving and family support; we know little about how health is changing as later cohorts enter the retirement age. Similarly, while we know that mortality is still falling, a recent OECD study was not able to determine whether morbidity rates also decline at ages relevant for employment, because it lacked panel data on health and labour market status. SHARE provides such data and its value as a research infrastructure lies in the combination of health and employment data with economic and social status. For example, SHARE is the first survey in Ireland that includes comparable information about out-of-pocket payments for health care expenditures as well as health services utilisation and the quality of health care for older persons.

SHARE will also critically provide a database of the health, economic and social conditions on this Irish population, in a manner directly comparable to more than 30,000 Europeans. From SHARE, we already know that intergenerational financial transfers are a major source of household wealth, but there is a clear North-South gradient. In Northern Europe, younger individuals receive more from their parents, while in the South, younger individuals frequently provide more for their parents. The study also shows that the distribution of inheritances is also very unequal. In terms of

amounts inherited, the top 5 per cent of households have received about two thirds of all inheritances. Or cross-country differences in cognitive function correspond closely to cross-country differences in education. Depression is more frequent among persons with low income or low wealth, particularly in the northern countries of Europe.

The value of SHARE will fully unfold once it becomes longitudinal, that is, once it covers a significant time period over which respondents are repeat interviewed and are exposed to the ageing process and the societal changes accompanying it. The current social and economic reforms and their effects on employment, health, economic and social status of the respondents can be observed as we will be seeing the effect of these societal changes in 'real time'. Hence, SHARE also serves as a monitoring tool for current public policy. Of course, with such a longitudinal study, we are also going to observe the challenge of end-of-life and SHARE is sensitively handling this in a manner that will also reveal important information about the experience of death and dying on the respondent's family.

SHARE's greatest value will only be revealed through its use by the research community. We encourage the widest possible use of the data and welcome any queries.

Professor Colm Harmon, Director of the UCD Geary Institute and Professor of Economics at UCD & Dr Liam Delaney, Senior Researcher at the UCD Geary Institute and Lecturer in the UCD School of Economics and School of Public Health and Population Science. They lead the Irish country team for SHARE together with colleagues in UCD and NUIG.

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