



August 2008

## Retirement

### The Twilight Years - or a concept past its use by date?

The dictionary definition of “retire” is to withdraw, go away, retreat, become unsociable, or seek seclusion from the world. I doubt if many older people see their life in these terms. In fact, “retirement” by this definition is inappropriate for the period of life after involvement in the workforce, and even the Retirement Commissioner herself agrees with this.

So what do we mean by “retirement”? Is it an event or ceremony to mark the end of working life, at which everyone mouths compliments (whether sincere or not) and at which, traditionally, a clock is given and received? This is what we mean when we talk about going to someone’s “retirement”. Is it a process, a transition? In an article entitled *Second Adolescence? The transition from paid employment*, Schuller<sup>1</sup> discussed the increasingly complex transition between work and retirement. Just as there is no longer a simple transition from education to work, there is now another heterogeneous and ambiguous stage at the end of working life. He called this “work-ending” and likened it to adolescence. In both stages we may move in and out of different circumstances until we settle into a more permanent situation.

Retirement could be a life stage. A hundred years ago, people entered the workforce about age 14 and left at 65, but then had only five years, on average, before they died. Now the average age of entry is 22, given the expansion of tertiary education and training. People still tend to retire at 65, but this leaves 20 years of life, on average, before death – a significant life stage. Linked to this is a definition of retirement as an alternative lifestyle. We hear about “retirement housing”, “retirement activities” and “retirement travel”. Affluent older people are able to enjoy years of leisure and recreation and are often depicted thus in advertising.

We may need some thought and planning to assist in finding our way through this transition and adjusting to this lifestyle. As Will Rogers said “Half our life is spent trying to find something to do with the time we have rushed through life trying to save.” Paid work is a large part of our lives, for men and for most women, and can meet a range of our needs, for income, mental stimulation, social contact, and so on. Adjusting to retirement means coping with a drop in income, increased discretionary time, a decline in social status and possibly reduced social contact. How can we respond? The gerontological literature is informative on this count. Firstly, there are theories around substitution – finding alternatives to paid work which meet similar needs and provide similar outcomes. I found this process working for older people who were engaged in study. Many timetabled regular attendance at university and even granted themselves “holidays”. Another process is continuity - keeping on doing the same things. Gail Sheehy summed this up well. “When men reach their sixties and retire, they go to pieces. Women go right on cooking”. Most of us do not have personality changes when we reach our sixties, we go on being the same people with the same likes and dislikes in terms of how we use our time. This helps to retain stability in our lives.

A third strategy is selection, optimisation and compensation, which sounds complicated, but is very practical. A useful example is the case of the ageing concert pianist. S/he will select the pieces which they know they can play well. S/he will practice hard to optimise performance. And to compensate for possible reduced capability s/he will slow down the passages before the fast ones, so that they sound fast by comparison. It is helpful to work this out in our own lives. Many older people are taking up these strategies without even knowing it and thus helping to make their “Twilight years” a time of choice and opportunity instead.

*Judith Davey*

<sup>1</sup> Schuller, T. (1987) “Second Adolescence? The transition from paid employment”, *Work, Employment and Society*, 1(3):352-370.

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## Aims of the Association

- To stimulate interest and action in all matters concerning the welfare of older people.
- To encourage the training of those caring for older people.
- To act as advisors to interested persons, bodies or groups on aspects of ageing.
- To study ageing in all its forms, and to promote gerontological research.

## Editorial - Enhancing Social Participation for Active Older People

The lead article on retirement draws attention to current ambiguities in conceptualising the transition years into later life. Altering lifestyles and improved health status are changing the experience of old age here and in other countries around the globe.

In June, I was fortunate in being invited to attend an international symposium in Seoul that addressed issues around enhancing social participation for active older people. Hosted by the Korean Gerontological Society, the symposium theme was a "New Culture for Old Age". Korean academics spoke, along with an Anthropology Professor from Japan and the Vice President of Elder Hostels, USA.

A lasting impression of the conference was the similarity of gerontological issues facing the countries represented at the symposium, despite their cultural and demographic diversity. All the countries have needed to re-think their responses to a rapidly ageing population and to introduce services and funding schemes aimed at stimulating older people's involvement in society. They have also needed to balance their emphasis on social participation with the realities of providing support and care for those with disability or failing health.

Demographically, the scale of difference between the countries discussed was immense. In Korea, only 10% of the population is aged over 65. Despite this, their numbers already far exceed those for the entire population of New Zealand. Furthermore the number of older people in Korea is expected to take only 17 years to double. Japan, in contrast, already has 23 million older people, some 21% of their total population.

Planning timelines for population ageing differed among the countries. The Republic of Korea anticipates that its surge in numbers of older people will be in 2018. This



date is seven years later than the baby boomer increases expected for New Zealand, and is linked to the ending of the Korean War.

The programmes introduced by countries to encourage older people's participation have been guided by their unique national circumstances. In Japan, 'sunset' divorces are an increasing phenomenon

and social prejudice to the marriage and re-marriage of older citizens is being overcome. Dance parties or group meetings are held to help older people find a partner, much the same as for younger 'singles' here. In Okinawa, which is famed for its prolonged life expectancy, the longevity of citizens aged over 97 (and able to stand for 2 hours) is celebrated with a special rite-of-passage ceremony. The older person parades through the streets with bands and traffic control before being feted at a special celebratory function.

Elder Hostels in North America have recognised generational differences in older people with their introduction of a special Road Scholar scheme designed for people in their 60s. Travel groups in this scheme are small in size, feature 'hands-on' activities, and have options for independent exploration.

Attending a symposium such as this one in Seoul was very energising. So many insights were gained from communicating with people from other nations. From 5-9 July 2009, the 19th IAGG World Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics is being held in Paris. I would recommend this to anyone who may have an opportunity to travel to Europe next year. For more information: [www.gerontologyparis2009.com](http://www.gerontologyparis2009.com).

**Verna Schofield**  
*National President*

## Economic Impact of Dementia

Alzheimer's New Zealand recently released the 'Dementia Economic Impact Report 2008'. This report was commissioned to provide an up to date profile of dementia in New Zealand. It includes the prevalence of dementia; financial and social costs; and the challenges for prevention, treatment and support.

Here are just a few highlights:

- Prevalence in 2008 is estimated at 40,746 (1% of the population). By 2026 this is predicted to increase to 74,821 (1.5% of the population).
- The total financial cost of dementia was estimated at \$712.9 million for 2008. Of this, \$435.7 million was health costs (hospitals, GPs, aged care, pharmaceuticals, and research).
- The burden of disease (loss of wellbeing and quality of life) was measured using Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs), an international system for measuring the impact of disease. The net value of the burden of disease was estimated at \$9.04 billion in 2008.

The Report concludes by recommending a national

New Zealand Dementia Care strategy, with the following five key elements:

1. Investment in research for cause, prevention and care in the New Zealand setting.
2. Early intervention through improvement in diagnosis and access to cost effective pharmacotherapies through Pharmac.
3. Comprehensive provision of support, education and respite services in the community.
4. Quality residential care, appropriately financed, that is centred on the person living with dementia and their family/carer.
5. Provision for specific needs such as people with younger onset dementia, behaviour that is challenging to others, people from different ethnicities, and people living in remote areas.

For the Summary and full Report, visit the Alzheimers New Zealand website [www.alzheimers.org.nz](http://www.alzheimers.org.nz)

*Editors Note: We can all do something to reduce the prevalence and therefore costs of dementia - see 'Reducing Your Risk of Dementia' - NZAG Newsletter August 2007*

## Falls and Vitamin D

ACC has recently released "Vitamin D Prescribing Criteria", developed by Professor John Campbell, Assoc. Professor Ngaire Kerse, Professor Ian Reid, Associate Professor Robert Scragg, Laird Madison and ACC.

Vitamin D supplements have been shown to significantly reduce falls in older adults.

Low Vitamin D levels are common in older adults in residential care and in some sub-groups within the community, such as people with chronic health conditions and limited mobility. Low levels lead to muscle weakness and atrophy (particularly in fast twitch muscle fibres), an increase in postural sway and impaired psychomotor function. Vitamin D deficiency also

increases bone turnover and leads to osteoporosis.

International research has indicated that muscle weakness and poor balance underlie most falls that occur in older adults. Muscle strength has been shown to decline with age and there is a significant association between muscle strength and Vitamin D levels.

Vitamin D supplementation provides an easy and effective means for falls reduction in older adults, and the precise dosages for prescribing Vitamin D supplements is given in the ACC publication.

Given the huge impact of falls, it is very important that we spread the word on this easy and effective intervention.

## Research

### MSD Working Group looking at research on ageing

This group has been set up in response to the Chris Cunningham report of December 2005 and its membership includes several NZAG members. For example, Sally Keeling, Canterbury president (and Director of NZiRA) and Carole Gordon, chair of the Tauranga chapter. There is an invitation to comment on research-related issues that many NZAG members may be interested in pursuing. For further information visit [www.gerontology.org.nz](http://www.gerontology.org.nz) and send in your ideas.

### Emerging Researchers in Ageing (ERA) Initiatives

Applications are open for the 2009 ERA Masterclass, which will be held at the University of Queensland St. Lucia Campus on 5-6 February 2009. Applications from PhD students should

be submitted online at [www.zoomerang.com/Survey/?p=WEB227X9TKABEW](http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/?p=WEB227X9TKABEW) or through [L.Peach@uq.edu.au](mailto:L.Peach@uq.edu.au)

### Older People & Ageing Research & Development Network - Wales/Cymru

OPAN Cymru produces a weekly bulletin with information about ageing research funding, events, jobs etc. As an example, a recent edition included a call for papers by the Journal of Aging and Social Policy, who will have a special issue on older workers and aging policy (2 page letter of interest due 30 September, manuscripts due January 2009).

If you would like to receive this bulletin, please email [k.g.fitzgerald@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:k.g.fitzgerald@swansea.ac.uk) and you will be added to the mailing list. Also, visit [www.opanwales.org.uk](http://www.opanwales.org.uk) for more information about OPAN.

## Seniors Without Borders

Seniors without Borders is a not-for-profit organisation of older people dedicated to making use of their lifetime experience, their skills and their determination to the benefit of those less fortunate in the world. Sharing similar principles to organizations such as Doctors and Engineers without Borders, Seniors without Borders has the mandate to 'use and communicate the professional and human resources among seniors who with their lifelong working experience want to improve life conditions for the poorest in all parts of the world'.

Formed in 2002 in Denmark, Seniors without Borders continues its commitments internationally. It supports local development projects around the world, including Bicycles for Senegal, support for street youths in Peru, education projects in Vietnam and much more. Seniors without Borders is always looking for participants and collaborators for its various international projects. If you would like more information or to find out how to become involved, please email Chairman Stig Elliot Nyegaard ([elliott@post1.tele.dk](mailto:elliott@post1.tele.dk)) or visit their website at [www.seniorerudengraenser.dk](http://www.seniorerudengraenser.dk)

## Web Sight

In this regular column we sample a few of the interesting resources related to ageing available on the internet.

### New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services

NZCCSS is publicising issues for older people in the period leading up to this year's general election. The latest issue of their Services for Older People Newsletter is now available and you can find more information through: [www.justiceandcompassion.org.nz](http://www.justiceandcompassion.org.nz)

### British Society of Gerontology - Ethical Guidelines

The BSG has launched a set of ethical guidelines which they hope will be of value to all social gerontologists when planning their research. The aim is to present questions that everyone needs to consider and principles that we need to abide by. In the world of social research, ethical procedures and approval are a part of our practice.

The guidelines have been put together by Sheila Peace, building on the work of colleagues - particularly Bill Bytheway and Joanna Bornat - at the Faculty of Health and Social Care, The Open University. They are available on the BSG website: <http://www.britishgerontology.org/>

### New book on the Rights of Older Persons

Edited by Prof. Kate Mewhinney and Dr. Israel Doron, the book brings together a unique collection of the main international documents relating to the rights of older persons. The book provides - for the first time - a broad and comprehensive picture of the worldwide activities in the field of international law and ageing.

For more details see International Federation on ageing website: [www.ifa-fiv.org/en/accueil1.aspx](http://www.ifa-fiv.org/en/accueil1.aspx)

### Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

This very well designed site aims to provide support for both grandparents and children in their care. The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust was founded in the late 1990s by a North Shore grandmother frustrated at the lack of support available for people in her situation. On the site you will find a range of information to assist those giving care for grandchildren and for those wanting to know more about the Trust's work.

Go to [www.raisinggrandchildren.org.nz](http://www.raisinggrandchildren.org.nz).

### Age Concern New Zealand

This website has recently been updated and you will find the pages very informative with up-to-date news on ageing issues, policy and services for older people. The sections on men's health, elder abuse and advocacy are particularly worth a visit. Available at [www.ageconcern.org.nz](http://www.ageconcern.org.nz)

## Auckland Branch

NZAG Auckland Branch welcomes two new executive members, Valerie Wright-St Clair and Ineke Riley-Stol, who will share the role of branch secretary. We wish Sarah Walter-Puttick, previous secretary to the branch, all the best for the future.

The Auckland Branch has had a variety of interesting guest speakers over the past few months. In April, Dr Shankar Sankaran, Lorraine Hall, and Mary Stewart held a joint presentation about 'Community Geriatric Services (CGS) - A new CMBHB Initiative'. May's branch meeting saw the HOPE Foundation for Research on Ageing Summer Students carry on the tradition of presenting excellent short-term projects. Joel Rabindran spoke about the 'Reactions to the final frontier in healthcare: ROBOTS' and Farrah Rodrigues presented her paper 'Is it your diet or your genes that affect your risk of developing prostate disease?' In June, Liz Kiata reported findings from her doctoral work about the social worlds of rest home dwelling elders.

## Dunedin Branch

Dunedin Branch has had a variety of interesting sessions, which have included:

A visit to the Abbeyfield complex; Jeannette Allan talking about her project 'Older women's experience of living with depression'; and Fiona Main's experience as a researcher in the Dunedin VIP falls prevention trial. Linda Robertson gave a report on the study 'Interviewing the Interviewers', which was also a practice for the upcoming British Society of Gerontology conference in Bristol. Most recently, Rosemary Caulton explored the construction of the older identity through references to the work of Simone de Beauvoir.

## Conferences 2008

**Sept. 3-6**

### **Copenhagen, Denmark**

5th Congress of the EUGMS (European Union Geriatric Medicine Society)  
Web: <http://eugms2008.org>

**Sept. 4-6**

### **Bristol, UK**

BSG 37th Annual Conference:  
Sustainable futures for an ageing world  
Web: [www.britishgerontology.org](http://www.britishgerontology.org)

**Sept. 4-6**

### **Montréal, Canada**

International Federation on Ageing  
9th Global Conference on Ageing and Design for an Ageing Society Exposition  
Web: [www.expageing.com](http://www.expageing.com)

**Sept. 8-10**

### **Melbourne, Australia**

Australian and New Zealand Society for Geriatric Medicine Annual Scientific Meeting  
Web: [www.asgm.org.au](http://www.asgm.org.au)

**Sept. 18-19**

### **Sydney, Australia**

National Dementia Research Forum  
Web: [www.dementia.unsw.edu.au](http://www.dementia.unsw.edu.au)

**Sept. 26-28**

### **Shanghai, China**

International Conference on the Development of Old Age Programs. Hosted by Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau and Shanghai People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.  
Web: [www.iecforsw.com/agingconfercece.htm](http://www.iecforsw.com/agingconfercece.htm)

**Sept. 28-Oct 1**

### **Adelaide, Australia**

ACSA 08 Aged Care in the Fast Lane  
Web: [www.agedcare.org.au](http://www.agedcare.org.au)

**Oct. 12-14**

### **Melbourne, Australia**

3rd Australian and New Zealand Falls Prevention Conference  
Web: [www.anzfpconference.com](http://www.anzfpconference.com)

**Nov. 13**

### **Bali, Indonesia**

Asia Pacific Geriatric Conference  
Web: [www.apgcbali.com](http://www.apgcbali.com)

**Nov. 19-21**

### **Freemantle, Australia**

Australian Association of Gerontology  
41st National Conference - Ageing Landscapes  
Web: [www.aagconference.com](http://www.aagconference.com)

**Nov. 20-21**

### **Sydney, Australia**

Ageing Community Conference  
Web: [www.halledit.co.au/conferences](http://www.halledit.co.au/conferences)

**Nov. 20-24**

### **Washington, USA**

The Gerontological Society of America  
61st Annual Scientific Meeting  
Web: [www.geron.org](http://www.geron.org)

**Nov. 27-28**

### **Melbourne, Australia**

Royal Australia & NZ College of Psychiatry Conference Ageing & Mental Health: Preparing for our future  
Email: [sacha.rodier@ranzcp.org](mailto:sacha.rodier@ranzcp.org)

## Conferences 2009

**July 5-10**

### **Paris, France**

19th International Association of Gerontology World Congress  
Web: [www.paris2009.org](http://www.paris2009.org)

## Editor's Desk

The next Newsletter will be circulated in December 2008.

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- for:
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  - Canterbury Branch
  - Wellington Branch
  - Waikato Branch
  - Sub branches – Palmerston North, Otago, Tauranga

### **Membership**

Any person interested in promoting the aims of the Association can be a member of the NZAG. This may include members of the public, health professionals, care staff, administrators, managers, representatives from organisations involved with the wellbeing of older people, and academics interested in gerontological research. If you are interested in becoming a member, contact: [national@gerontology.org.nz](mailto:national@gerontology.org.nz)

