



Report from the 2nd International Conference on Health Ageing & Longevity, Brisbane Australia, March 18-20, 2005

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The conference saw the airing of a variety of data related to human longevity. This ranged from 'love' to 'stem cell research' and from 'women's intuition' to 'male physical activity'.

Background

The conference included 80 Australian and International experts providing leading edge, evidence-based knowledge on the achievement of increased human longevity and healthy/disability free life expectancy.

Papers of particular interest included:

Eat less live more - does it work?

It's been said that even if calorie restriction doesn't make you live longer it will make you feel as though you have. An Australian researcher argues that it does work and some of the current life-enhancing medications used to treat age-related diseases are imitating the effects of eating less calories. But we're not doing too badly anyway.

"The evidence from animals is that if you cut the calories they consume by 20% you can prolong their lives by around 20%, but if you look at the increases in human survival over the last 100 years, we've beaten these lab rats hands down," claims Associate Professor Arthur Everitt of the Centre for Education and Research on Ageing (CERA) at the University of Sydney.

"People in countries like Australia are living 60% longer now than at the beginning of the 20th Century, and just in the last 30 years the introduction of medications to lower blood pressure and cholesterol have by themselves added five to ten years," claims Dr Everitt who will present his findings at the 2nd International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity which will be held in

Brisbane from March 18-20, 2005.

"Interestingly we may already be doing what works for these rats without realising it. Calorie restriction in rodents delays diseases of ageing and death itself. We don't have the same evidence in humans of actually prolonging life but we do know that people eating fewer calories have fewer risk factors for common diseases - things like high blood pressure, high blood fats and poor blood sugar control leading to diabetes. And that's exactly what these medications are doing even in people who aren't dieting.

"The point is," says Dr Everitt, "that the idea which is about at the moment that a simple and cheap combination of medications for almost everyone of a certain age, might be the real elixir of youth, not to mention putting fewer calories on your plate."

Dying Before Your Time: There's No Mystery

Women who say they feel unwell probably are according to unique Australian research.

"When you talk about living a long time in good health, people imagine there are all sorts of secrets and life prolonging potions waiting to be discovered. This unique Australian study is showing that for women at least, we mostly know what to do already," claims Professor Annette Dobson, an internationally recognised bio-statistician at the University of Queensland.

"We have been following the health of more than forty thousand women who are participating in the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health," says Professor Dobson, who will present her findings at the 2nd International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity which will be held in Brisbane from March 18-20, 2005. "Some of the women were in their 70s when the study began and we knew from past statistics that on

average these women should have lived another 14 years. But some of them died 'before their time' if you like. And the question was why?"

Of 12,400 women in this group, there were 1400 early deaths.

"If a woman rated her own health as poor, regardless of what might have been wrong with her, she had four times the risk of dying early than women who rated themselves as well," says Professor Dobson.

"Interestingly this matches research on ageing from Dubbo in NSW which found the same thing in both men and women. In a sense, people have a pretty good idea of whether they're well.

"Smoking and not getting any exercise more than doubled their chances of early death. However even women who gave up smoking only 5 years ago decreased their risk.

"The message is that there are lifestyle factors that are fixable or preventable and you can reasonably assume that women's lives can be extended in reasonable quality if they are more proactive with their health," argues Professor Dobson.

Keeping your mind young when you live long - an Australian study has some answers in men- and some disturbing findings.

"When you ask people about living a long time, most will say there's little point unless you enjoy the extra years, and there are few things more miserable than not being in good mental health," says Prof. Konrad Jamrozik, Professor of Evidence Based Health Care at the University of Queensland.

"We've been following the health and wellbeing of 600 men in their 80s, looking particularly at their mental health. Things like depression," explains Prof. Konrad Jamrozik who will present his findings at the 2nd International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity which will be held in Brisbane from March 18-20, 2005.

"What we found has surprised us. Most of these men - about three-quarters of them - had aged very well when it came to their mental health - as judged from both their thinking and their mood. Whether or not they were married, and even the extent of their physical illness didn't seem to be factors. Nor were aspects of lifestyle such as diet or smoking habits in their seventies particularly important.

"What did stand out though was physical activity. Men who were physically active in their later years were almost twice as likely to be in good mental health at the age of 80. This fits with a growing body of research indicating that exercise has far greater impact on overall wellbeing than people used to think. For instance, physical training helps both to prevent depression in the elderly and to lift it faster if depression does occur,"

argues Prof. Konrad Jamrozik. "And the great thing is that physical activity is safe, cheap and in theory available to everyone."