

GRC News

The newsletter of the Gerontology Research Centre

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY AT HARBOUR CENTRE, VANCOUVER, CANADA

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Message from the Director

by Andrew Sixsmith, Director, SFU Gerontology Research Centre

This year was the 25th anniversary of the GRC that was marked by an evening reception held during the annual John K. Friesen Conference at the Vancouver Harbour Centre in May. The reception was attended by over 150 people, including many friends and alumni from over the years. A slide show of faces - past and present - assembled by Raymond Adams (Information Officer, GRC), provided a backdrop to speeches by SFU President Michael Stevenson, Dr. Paul Budra (Associate Dean of the Faculty of Arts), Andrew Wister, Gloria Gutman and myself. A very moving part of the celebration was a presentation to Gloria Gutman by John and Marta Friesen of a commemorative globe showing the destinations of her international travels in recognition of Gloria's great contribution to SFU and the world of gerontology. The celebration also included presentations of the 2008 Senior Leadership Awards to four remarkable seniors from BC

(see back page for further details).

Looking forward, there are some exciting changes in the pipeline. The *GRC News* and *Seniors' Housing Update* will be undergoing an overhaul. The look and layout will change next year and there will be two issues per year, rather than three. This will allow us to improve on the existing excellent newsletters and at the same time make more use of electronic media. The GRC website has already undergone a radical change in its appearance and coming months will see the content become much more current and interactive. Looking further forward to the Olympic year of 2010, the GRC will be hosting the biannual conference of the International Society of Gerontechnology. This will be a great opportunity to develop the GRC's international profile.

This semester, I have had the pleasure of teaching two classes; a graduate course on "Aging in a Technological World" and an undergraduate course on "International Perspectives on Aging." While my focus in the GRC is on research, I have

always enjoyed teaching. Class discussions are good for exploring new ideas and results of research and there are also opportunities for combining teaching and research. In the technology course, the students are compiling a report on the market potential for using information and communication technologies to support independent living. Not only does compiling this report provide insights into the topic area, but also involves them in "live" research that will have real benefits outside the academic world. Taking an international perspective on aging is also very illuminating. We often think of population aging as something primarily associated with the developed nations in the world. However, the next decades will see very rapid rises in the numbers of older people in the developing world. For example, the least developed nations in the world (including many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa) will see the numbers of people aged over 60 years double by 2025 (useful publications and data can be found at the Population Division of the UN: <http://www.un.org/esa/population/unpop.htm>). While we should not necessarily characterize these demographic changes as "problems," the aging of populations worldwide, and in the developing world in particular, is an issue that will loom ever larger on the political agenda.



Andrew Wister and Andrew Sixsmith join in the presentation to Gloria Gutman, by John and Marta Friesen (pictured), of a commemorative globe showing the destination of her international travels in the service of gerontology.



A comparative analysis of internet health information use between Canadian baby boomers and older adults

by Danielle Sinden, MA Gerontology

(Editor's Note: The following article is based upon Danielle Sinden's MA thesis: Sinden, D. (2008). A comparative analysis of internet health information use between Canadian baby boomers and older adults. M.A. Thesis, Department of Gerontology (Supervisors: A. Wister).)

'Internet' and 'health' are two words that have been used together more frequently over the last decade; often referred to as 'e-health.' According to Health Canada, e-health is "an overarching term used today to describe the application of information and communications technologies in the health sector" (Health Canada, 2006). E-health can include broad types of health technology, such as telehealth and electronic health records, however it also encompasses health information on the Internet; the main focus of the current study.

The baby boomer generation, defined as persons born between 1946 and 1965, has drawn the attention of health researchers and policy makers over the last decade. They are often viewed as being a burden on the future health care system, as they rapidly approach the age of 65; since this is the age of onset of disability and illness for many people. Targeting modifiable risk factors for change and promoting health education at this point in their life course could facilitate lifestyle changes that may have long term health benefits. As a cohort, the baby boomers are known for being techno-savvy and interested in new ways to achieve their health goals that will not only accommodate their busy lifestyles, but also help them maintain their independence (Gilbert, 2000). This makes them a prime target for online health information and other e-health tools. This study focuses on an emerging sub-field in the research literature: description and examination of predictors of Internet use for the purpose of obtaining health information among baby boomers.

Making health information more accessible could change the way that people use

health care (Baker et al., 2003). For example, it could result in people being more knowledgeable about their health issues and the care that they are receiving, such as asking appropriate questions or communicating more effectively with their physician. It could also prompt individuals to seek timely care that could affect illness outcomes or allow people to manage their own care and avoid expensive medical treatment (Baker et al., 2003). Health knowledge and health promotion is associated with better health outcomes, therefore increasing access to online health information could help reduce the socioeconomic differential that exists between advantaged and disadvantaged populations.

There are many concerns that need to be addressed when it comes to the Internet and health that should not be overlooked. For example, consumers of health information need to know where to go to access accurate health information and how to be selective in the information they find. Self-diagnosis, improper medication use, and delaying professional treatment are risks of providing unsupervised health information. There is also the risk of information overload resulting in a person being more confused about their health concerns. However, overall it is thought that the benefits of using the Internet for health information such as improved health knowledge and communication of health concerns outweigh possible negative outcomes.

Using the 2000 General Social Survey (GSS) (Statistics Canada, 2001) and the 2005 Canadian Internet Use Survey (CIUS) (Statistics Canada, 2007), it was found that not only are the baby boomers more likely to have Internet access and use the Internet more often than older adults, but they are also more likely to use the Internet for health information. Approximately 84% of adults 35-44 and 74% of adults 45-54 reported ever using the Internet, compared to 57% of people

55-64 and 26% of people 65 and older. Interestingly, women had slightly higher rates of Internet use than men for the baby boomer groups, however for the 65 and older group, the association is reversed; men reported higher rates of Internet use than women. Being married, living in an urban area (as opposed to a rural region) and health status were also variables associated with using the Internet. Socioeconomic indicators including education and income were strong predictors of Internet use, suggesting that the digital divide that tends to exist among disadvantaged populations does indeed exist.

Patterns for Internet health information use were similar to those found for general Internet use, although the rates of use for health purposes were much lower. When it comes to gender differences, baby boomer females had the highest rates of Internet health information use, while older women (65+) had the lowest. This could be related to the care-giving role that is often assumed by women in their mid-life

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BC Network for Aging Research
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years, or it could be that women are more motivated than men to seek health information. Conversely, older women may not have the resources or knowledge needed to access online health information. For types of health information that people search for, older adults are more likely to search for information on medications; whereas baby boomers are more likely to search for information on symptoms and health care. People in all age groups tend to spend more time searching for information on specific diseases than other health topics. For types of sites that people turn to, all age groups tend to access government health sites (e.g., Health Canada) more than other types of health sites (i.e., commercial, non-profit, etc.). It could be that people are more likely to trust these sites since they are sponsored by the government.

In the logistic regression analysis, the socioeconomic block (which included education and income) had the strongest effect on Internet health information use, where the likelihood of using the Internet for health information increased dramatically for those with higher education and income levels (compared to those with lower levels). The association gets even stronger with age suggesting that income

and education as barriers to Internet use are magnified in old age and that the digital divide is stronger for older adults. There are several reasons why this may be the case, however the study was not able to uncover age-cohort and period effects that could explain the findings.

The results from the study indicate that access and use are particularly low among those 65 and older, older women, people that are not married, people living in rural areas, people with lower levels of education and income and people with poorer health status. In addition to the issues associated with the digital divide, it is no surprise that quality is a serious problem when it comes to using the Internet. Since anyone can post health information on the Internet, inaccurate and potentially harmful information can be accessed by anyone if they aren't careful. Just as health care providers are held to certain standards, the Internet as an information medium should also have standards it needs to meet. With the abundance of health information available on the Internet, people are bound to be confronted with irrelevant or inaccurate information that could lead to negative outcomes. Consumers of health information need to have health literacy and knowledge skills that allow them to

critically evaluate the quality of information they find on the Internet, however websites should also be accountable for the information they provide.

Collaboration has been identified as a key factor in the success of the e-health revolution thus far (Health Canada, 2006). Much of the literature points to policy as playing a key role in reducing inequalities related to accessing online health information (i.e., reducing the digital divide) (Cotton & Gupta, 2004; Brodie et al., 2000; Pandey et al., 2003; Gilmour, 2007). Stakeholders need to work together to make the Internet more accessible as a health promotion tool for the adult and older adult population. This could include collaborative initiatives between government, private industry, non-profit associations, professional health associations, health promotion advocates and senior advocacy groups.

The results from the study and the findings from the literature indicate that there are several gaps surrounding the use of the Internet for health information. The current study was cross-sectional in nature, examining age differences at one point in time, however a longitudinal design or using several cross-sectional data sets might help in establishing trends over



Funded by the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research (MSFHR), BCNAR brings together researchers from different disciplines, research streams, academic institutions, community-based organizations & health regions. BCNAR's goal is to provide opportunities for researchers to collaborate in generating innovative aging research.

STUDENT TRAINING IN AGING RESEARCH (STAR)

STAR is a new program developed by BCNAR to support students involved in aging research in BC.

Opportunities through STAR include:

FUNDING – travel and student data collection awards;

TRAINING – Annual competition. 2 day workshop designed for Graduate Students who are currently conducting thesis or dissertation work or research in the area of aging and health. In addition, those in Post-Doctoral positions or the equivalent are welcome to apply. 2008 competition deadline November 14, 2008

RESOURCES – Access to information and services to aid research

NETWORKING – Opportunities to connect with peers and mentors

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time and within a particular generation (i.e., the baby boomers) in order to better predict future patterns and help untangle age, cohort and period effects. Due to the ever-changing nature of the Internet and increasing accessibility, a more recent Canadian survey on Internet use is also needed. Since it is predicted that Internet health information could change health utilization, future research should examine the role that health information could play in primary care. A further examination of the policy issues surrounding Internet health information use, and more specifically how to reduce the digital divide, is also needed.

The results also indicate that health information needs differ by age and that health information is not one-size-fits-all. If we take a healthy lifestyle perspective when deciding what type of health information to provide (as opposed to a disease-focused approach), we might be able to decrease the number of people who search for disease-specific information and increase the number of people who search for lifestyle information and want to increase their health knowledge. The characteristics of the baby boomers, including their stage of life, their interest in health and their experience with technology makes them a prime target for online health information.

There are still many improvements that need to be made and policy issues

that need to be addressed in order for the Internet and online health information to reach more people. In particular, attention needs to be paid to vulnerable populations, since these people are less likely to use the Internet and are more likely to have health problems, indicating that their health information needs are greater. The Internet as a health promotion tool has an advantage over other strategies in that it is efficient, can reach large audiences and is becoming a common form of technology in households. If improvements can be made to the accessibility, quality and relevance of health information the impact it could have on the health outcomes of populations could be enormous.

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Due to a change in production schedule, I am taking this opportunity to advise our readers that this issue of the GRC News is v.27 no. 2-3 combining our Fall and Winter editions. Future editions of our GRC News and Seniors' Housing Update (SHUP) will be published twice a year coming out in April and October.

Raymond G. Adams, Information Officer, GRC; Editor, GRCNews/SHUP



GERONTOLOGY GRADUATE CAUCUS UPDATE

by Michael Campo & Melissa McVie (M.A. Candidates, Gerontology)

The Gerontology Graduate Caucus (GGC) would like to introduce this year's Executive Committee members. Taking on the role of GGC Chair is **Michael Campo**, while **Melissa McVie** returns as both the Vice Chair and Social Coordinator. **Yongjie Yon** is now the GGC Treasurer and **Kara Hay** has become the new GGC Secretary. In addition, **Ashleigh Wilson** has been elected as the Gerontology Representative to the Graduate Student Society (GSS) at Simon Fraser University.

The GGC would like to thank outgoing Executive Committee members, **Kahir Lalji** (Chair), **Adrienne Wedding** (Treasurer), **Alanna Larsen** (Secretary), the rest the Executive members, and all other GGC members for their efforts throughout the past year.

We are looking forward to yet another successful and exciting year. In

particular, the GGC is currently in the initial phase of planning the 10th Annual Careers Night in Gerontology and the 4th Annual Networking Wine and Cheese. Additionally, we will once again be participating in the Alzheimer's Society of BC Walk for Memories early in 2009.

The GGC and the Department of Gerontology would also like to congratulate and welcome six new graduate students as of September 2008: **Amanda Wilhelm**, **Amir Moztar-Zadeh**, **Ashleigh Wilson**, **Carol Hansen**, **Eddy Elmer**, and **Ravin Sandhu**.

To learn more about the GGC, please contact Michael Campo (GGC Chair) at michael_campo@sfu.ca

RECENT CENTRE ACTIVITIES

APPOINTMENTS

Dr. Gloria Gutman (Professor Emerita, Gerontology Department; Research Associate, Gerontology Research Centre; co-leader, BC Network for Aging Research) has been re-appointed to the WHO Expert Advisory Panel on Ageing for the period 2008 – 2010.

AWARDS & HONOURS

Congratulations to:

Sienna Boothman, MA Gerontology, is the successful recipient of a Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship – Doctoral valued at \$35,000/year for 3 years to undertake a PhD in an Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies Program (Sauder School of Business and the School of Nursing) at the University of British Columbia.

Heather Cooke, MA Gerontology, is the successful recipient of a SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship valued at \$35,000/year for 3 years to undertake a PhD at the University of Victoria.

Dr. Barbara Mitchell (Associate Professor, joint appointment, Department of Gerontology and Department of Sociology/Anthropology; she also coordinates the Certificate in Family Studies Program) is one of three faculty members from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) to be awarded the 2008 FASS Deans Medal for Academic Excellence. This award is conferred to a faculty member for their contributions to all three areas – research, teaching and service to the university. She was nominated by a colleague in the Department of Sociology/Anthropology and an independent review committee evaluated the nominations. These awards are highly competitive and a testimony to the high quality of our professoriate.

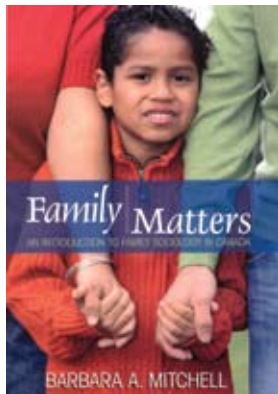
PUBLICATIONS

Mitchell, B.A. (2008). *Family matters: An introduction to family sociology in Canada*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE COURSES IN GERONTOLOGY

For information about enrolling in the Diploma, Minor, Masters or PhD in Gerontology contact:
Anne Marie Barrett
Tel: 778-782-5065 Email: geradmin@sfu.ca

NEW PUBLICATION



Mitchell, B.A. (2008). *Family matters: An introduction to family sociology in Canada*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press

ISBN: 9781551303413

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This refreshingly succinct and engaging introduction to family sociology in Canada has a strong focus on contemporary theory and research on a wide variety of substantive issues relevant to the lives of students from diverse family backgrounds. This book is organized into three interrelated areas: the study of continuity, diversity, inequality, and social change in families; the life course of families across the generations; and critical issues facing families today, including social policy issues.

Barbara A. Mitchell is Associate Professor of Sociology at Simon Fraser University, jointly appointed in the Department of Gerontology. She is the coordinator of the Family Studies Certificate Program.



IN THE NEWS

Gutman, G.M. “Efficiency Units Viable, Affordable Option for Seniors: Expert.” Provincial, A9, Danette Dooley, interviewer, June 4, 2008.

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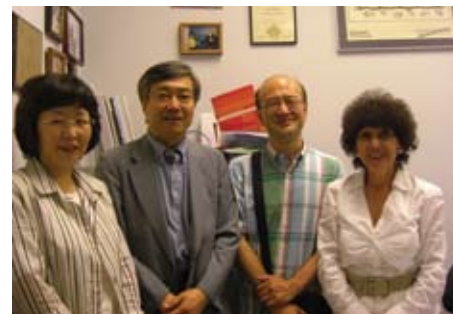
VISITORS TO THE CENTRE

In June 1, **Dr. Eunju Hwang**, (BC Real Estate Foundation Post-doctoral Fellow in Environmental Gerontology) welcomed **Dr. Kei Adachi**, M.Arch., Dr.Eng., (Professor, Department of Environmental Systems, Faculty of Systems Engineering, Wakayama University, Wakayama, Japan) to the Centre.

In August, **Drs. Takehiko Tanabe** and **Gloria Gutman** welcomed visitors **Dr. Yukio**



Dr. Eunju Hwang, (left); and Dr. Kei Adachi (right)]



Drs. Takehiko Tanabe (centre-right); Gloria Gutman (right); Dr. Yukio Osada (left); and Dr. Hisao Osada, (centre-left)]

Osada (Professor of Psychology, Seitoku University, Tokyo, Japan) and **Dr. Hisao Osada**, Professor of Psychology, J.F. Oberlin University, Tokyo, Japan) to the Centre.

2008 Senior Leadership Award for service

by Lillian Zimmerman, MSW, Research Associate in Gender Issues

A highlight of the 18th John K. Friesen Conference on March 28, 2008 was the presentation of the 7th Annual Senior Leadership Award (SLA). This annual award, initiated by Dr. Sandra Cusack, recently retired from SFU Gerontology Research Centre, was previously made to a volunteer who contributed as a leader in educational gerontology.

This year the SLA organizing committee (Andrew Wister, Loren Lovegreen, Raymond Adams and Lillian Zimmerman) decided to change the criteria by making it apply more broadly to those performing leadership roles for seniors more generally. The committee was surprised and delighted at the large number of seniors who were nominated for the 2008 award. In the past one to three awards have been presented, but given this year's response – and the calibre of the nominees – our committee decided to name four recipients.

In alphabetical order, here is a brief summary of this year's recipients:

Bev Christensen (Prince George, BC) has contributed widely to the well-being of seniors in her region. This includes being: a Board Member of Directors, Elder Citizens Recreation Association; a member of the Seniors Housing Committee; and a second term as President of the Prince George Council of Seniors. Bev is also a journalist who collects Prince George Pioneer Stories.

Jan Greenhow (New Westminster, BC) has been working as a volunteer for seniors in the New Westminster district for many years. Her contributory activities include working with: St. Barnabas Church; the Seniors Services Society; the Century House Senior Peer Counselling Program; and the Advisory Committee of the New Westminster City.

Art Kube (Burnaby, BC) is well known for his widely recognized services on behalf of seniors. He has organized major seniors conferences on issues of health, housing and income, has been active with the Elder Abuse Prevention and Medicare, having founded Seniors on Guard for Medicare. He is currently President of the Council of Seniors Citizens Organization (COSCO).

Chris Morrissey (Vancouver, BC) is Program Manager of Vancouver's Lesbian, Gay, Transgendered, Bisexual (LGTB) Generations Project, an innovative approach to age specific service delivery, education and community development which serves and supports members of the aging LGTB seniors. She has worked for the LGTB community for decades and is one of the founding members of the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Taskforce; considered directly accountable for changes in immigration legislation which now includes same-sex partners in the family class sponsorship.

These very brief *vitae* give us a glimpse of the exemplary contributions of volunteers working for seniors – volunteers who quietly make a profound difference in the lives of Seniors in BC. The Gerontology Research Centre is happy to provide them with this recognition.



Bev Christensen



Jan Greenhow



Art Kube



Chris Morrissey