

This issue features photos of the UW–Madison campus in winter. (Photos by Jeff Miller / UW–Madison)



Wisconsin Alzheimer's  
Disease Research Center  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

# Headlines

WINTER 2022

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Please join us!

The pandemic forced us to move most of our public events and programming online. We hope we can start to meet in person in the coming year, but we will continue to hold some events virtually. Below is a list of upcoming events – we hope you can join us!

**March 23, 6–7:30 p.m.**

*Mind Readers Book Club*

Join a live panel discussion via Zoom about *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot. Learn more about the event, our panelists, and how you can get a copy of the book on our website: [adrc.wisc.edu/bookclub](http://adrc.wisc.edu/bookclub)

**March 25, 10 a.m.–12 p.m.**

*Healthy Living with MCI: How to Practice Self-Care During a Pandemic*  
Healthy Living with MCI is a free, bimonthly support and educational series for people and families living with mild cognitive impairment (MCI). Learn more and register: [adrc.wisc.edu/mci](http://adrc.wisc.edu/mci)

What do you think about our virtual event programming? Do you have ideas for events or communications? Let us know by writing to us at [adrc@medicine.wisc.edu](mailto:adrc@medicine.wisc.edu) or calling (608) 265-0407.

## DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

### Federal government elevates prevention goal in national Alzheimer's disease plan

In 2011, former President Barack Obama signed into law the bipartisan National Alzheimer's Project Act (NAPA), which called for a coordinated and focused effort to address the crisis of Alzheimer's disease in the United States. A plan was released the following year that included five goals: 1) prevent and effectively treat Alzheimer's disease and related dementias by 2025; 2) optimize care quality and efficiency; 3) expand supports for people with Alzheimer's disease and their families; 4) enhance public awareness and engagement; and 5) track progress and drive development.

In December 2021, the council that administers NAPA officially announced the addition of a sixth goal — “accelerate action to promote healthy aging and reduce risk factors for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.”

As a National Institute on Aging-Designated Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, the Wisconsin ADRC's goals mirror those of the national plan. Our

research studies have long focused on identifying risk and protective factors for the disease and finding ways to delay onset and progression. As the national plan brings prevention into focus, our research in this area will expand, and so will our efforts to educate our research participants and the broader community about the importance of risk-reduction strategies such as managing high blood pressure, depression, and sleep disorders.

We are thankful for you, our active and involved Clinical Core participants and Research Recruitment Registry members. Your willingness to regularly attend study visits gives us a wealth of data for current and future research studies on prevention. While finding a cure for Alzheimer's disease may require more research and time, knowing how to effectively treat and prevent memory loss and other cognitive impairments, and moving that message into our health care and public health sectors, will help the nation achieve its goals in addressing Alzheimer's disease. ♦



Sanjay Asthana, MD  
Associate Dean for Gerontology  
Director, Wisconsin ADRC & Madison VA GRECC  
Professor, UW School of Medicine and Public Health

NEWS BRIEFS

Cynthia Carlsson, MD, MS, was appointed to a two-year term as chair of the U.S. Department of



Carlsson

Health and Human Services Advisory Council on Alzheimer's Research, Care, and Services. This national council was formed in

2011 in response to the National Alzheimer's Project Act (NAPA) to create a national strategic plan to address the rapidly escalating Alzheimer's disease and related dementias crisis.

Ozioma Okonkwo, PhD, received a grant from the National Institute on Aging (NIA) for the

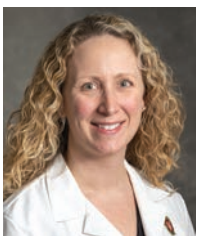


Okonkwo

Wisconsin site of the new international "Study to Uncover Pathways to Exceptional Cognitive Resilience in

Aging (SuperAging)." A Super-Ager is a person over the age of 80 who has the memory skills of someone who is at least 20 years younger. Okonkwo will study the factors that enable SuperAgers to remain cognitively sharp longer than their peers.

Amy Kind, MD, PhD, was named the inaugural associate dean for social health sciences and pro-



Kind

grams at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. Kind is an international leader in the field of health disparities research.

# Teaching others to help people with behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia

By Art Walaszek, MD

Changes in mood and behavior can be upsetting for people living with dementia and for their caregivers. Around 90% of people with



Walaszek

dementia experience depression, anxiety, agitation, or other behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD).

Patients and families may turn to their primary care clinics for help with these symptoms. Many older adults in Wisconsin can also reach out to the dementia care specialist in their county.

Fortunately, we can effectively address BPSD. People experiencing BPSD should get a complete medical evaluation. We generally avoid prescribing new medications and instead focus on improving communication, changing the environment, or using psychological techniques.

My colleagues and I at the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute (WAI) and Wisconsin Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (ADRC) have teamed up with professionals across the state to share these best practices.

Tammi Albrecht, DNP, and I use a model called academic detailing to teach physicians and nurse practitioners how to evaluate and safely manage BPSD. Through academic detailing, we learn what doctors need and help them make changes to their clinical practice. We have worked with colleagues at the Prairie Clinic in Sauk City, Richland Medical Center, and Milwaukee Health Services, Inc.

We also teach an approach called DICE, which stands for "Describe, Investigate, Create, and Evaluate" — the steps involved in ad-

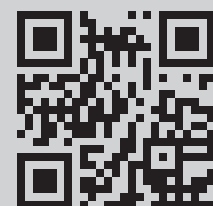
ressing BPSD without medications. Dementia experts at the University of Michigan and Johns Hopkins University developed DICE. It is now available online, which has come in handy during the pandemic.

Molly Schroeder, program manager at WAI, and Albrecht have taught DICE to 136 dementia care specialists and other dementia professionals across the state of Wisconsin. They are also working with nurses and medical assistants at Richland Medical Center and Milwaukee Health Services, Inc. People who learn DICE can in turn use this approach with the family and professional caregivers of people living with dementia.

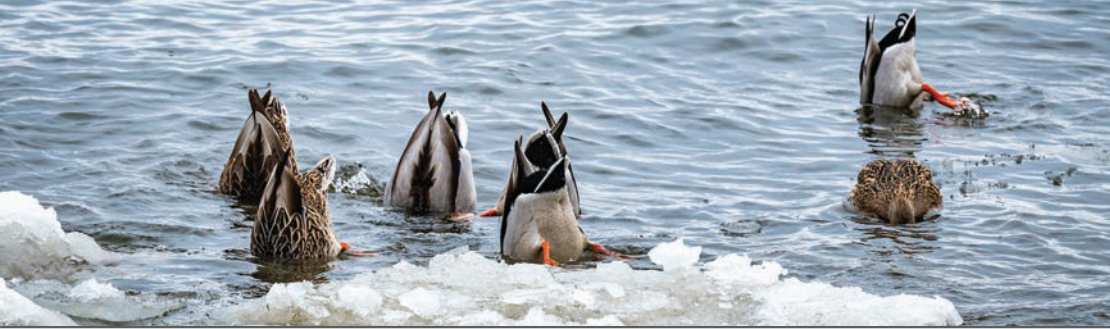
Rounding out the team is Tammy LeCaire, PhD, MS, a scientist who analyzes the results of these training programs.

The Wisconsin ADRC helps support my time academic detailing. WAI Director Cynthia Carlsson and I received a grant from the Wisconsin Partnership Program to support this project, along with a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Community Living supporting DICE training for dementia care specialists. ♦

Scan to listen to Dr. Walaszek on a past episode of *Dementia Matters*, "Understanding Behavioral and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia."



go.wisc.edu/072qht



## IN THE NEWS

### Dr. Ozioma Okonkwo discussed brain benefits of physical activity with Wisconsin’s first lady

Ozioma Okonkwo, PhD, an internationally renowned expert on risk and resilience factors for Alzheimer’s disease, recently met with Wisconsin First Lady Kathy Evers and shared why he believes physical activity is a “game changer” in reducing the risk for dementia.



“We believe that physical activity is one of the most potent ways that individuals can begin to take action against potential risk for Alzheimer’s and other dementias,” Okonkwo said in the interview.

He noted that physical activity can be fun and enjoyable, is free, and has no negative side effects if done correctly.

Okonkwo went on to explain that science has shown moderate-intensity physical activity has the most impact against cognitive decline, but any physical activity is beneficial for overall health. And it’s never too late to start.

“We’ve seen folks who have never exercised all their lives, and they come into our lab at the age of 65 or 70 and begin a regimen of physical activity,” he said. “We see very clear changes in their brain and cognitive health over time.” ◊



[go.wisc.edu/4jt8p6](http://go.wisc.edu/4jt8p6)

Scan to watch the first lady’s full interview with Dr. Okonkwo on YouTube.



## We are introducing QR codes!

In this newsletter and in other areas of your life, you may have noticed small boxes that remind you of bar codes. They are QR codes, or quick response codes, and they are shortcuts to webpages that work with a smartphone or tablet. You may have seen them used to point people to restaurant menus, coupons, or instructions on how to put something together. We are using them to point readers to articles on our website.

### How to use a QR code

Most smartphone cameras have a built-in QR code reader. To scan a QR code, open your camera app and point your camera at the QR code without taking a picture. You should see a website link appear on the image – tap it, and your smartphone’s web browser will take you to the webpage.

## NEWS BRIEFS

The UW Department of Medicine awarded a grant to **Diane Gooding, PhD,** and **Carey Gleason, PhD, MS,** for their project “Understanding Biomarker and Genetic Alzheimer’s Disease and Schizophrenia Research Participation in Underrepresented Groups.” The study team will



Gooding



Gleason

survey people from different race groups to try to understand why people are willing or unwilling to participate in research that includes biomarker screening and genetic testing. Gooding and Gleason hope the results of this research will lead to improvements in research recruitment strategies and diversity in research studies.

The Wisconsin ADRC podcast, *Dementia Matters*, recently achieved a quarter of a million episode downloads. There are more than 100 *Dementia Matters* episodes, and the podcast has listeners in every state and 110 countries.



**Nathaniel Chin, MD,** hosts the podcast where he interviews leading scientists and caregiving experts about the latest Alzheimer’s disease research and caregiver resources. Subscribe to *Dementia Matters* wherever you get your podcasts or listen to episodes online at [adrc.wisc.edu/dementia-matters](http://adrc.wisc.edu/dementia-matters).

## SELECTED OPEN STUDIES

### Dementia Care Research Core Recruitment Registry

The Dementia Care Research Core Recruitment Registry is a new opportunity for both people with memory issues and their caregivers. Care research focuses on understanding how to improve the quality of life for people with Alzheimer's disease and their families by looking at the care they receive at home or within the health care system. By enrolling in the registry, you and your caregiver agree to be contacted in the future about new research studies for which you may be eligible. You also agree to be contacted for a baseline survey phone call and annual survey phone calls. Contact the study team at [caregivercore@medicine.wisc.edu](mailto:caregivercore@medicine.wisc.edu) to learn how you can join the registry.

### Longitudinal Impact of Fitness and Exercise (LIFE) Study

The LIFE study is investigating the effects of aerobic fitness and physical activity to better understand how those factors might help to promote healthy brain aging and delay the onset of clinical symptoms of Alzheimer's disease in the future. Participation involves two visits that include: vitals, two blood draws, treadmill exercise test, MRI, two PET scans, (*optional*) lumbar puncture, two questionnaires, and wearing an accelerometer. We are currently recruiting cognitively healthy individuals age 45 and older who are enrolled in the Wisconsin ADRC Clinical Core. Contact Alyssa at [aapandos@medicine.wisc.edu](mailto:aapandos@medicine.wisc.edu) or (608) 265-6339 for more details.

**A full list of recruiting studies is on our website at [adrc.wisc.edu/open-studies](http://adrc.wisc.edu/open-studies). Some studies reimburse participants for their time and travel.**

### Siblings Caring for Parents with Dementia

Dr. Megan Gilligan and The Families in Later Life Research Lab at Iowa State University are conducting a study to better understand the role of family dynamics in the health and well-being of adult children who provide care to a parent with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD). Most of the previous work on family caregiving has focused on a single primary caregiver, but caregiving often involves multiple family members. This study is currently recruiting two adult children within the same family to discuss their unique experiences of providing care to an older parent with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia. This study is designed to be low maintenance and all data collection can take place remotely within your own home. Learn more at [tinyurl.com/485mmt8](http://tinyurl.com/485mmt8) or call (515) 294-5074 for details.

### The Synapse Project

The purpose of The Synapse Project is to collect brain scans that will provide images of synapses and determine how synapse health is related to Alzheimer's disease progression and pathology. The synapse is located at the end of a neuron (brain cell) and is the point at which an electrical or chemical signal passes between neurons. As part of this study, researchers will evaluate whether the amount of synapses that can be measured in the brain are related to a person's cognitive function. Contact Mary-Elizabeth Pasquesi at [mpasquesi@wisc.edu](mailto:mpasquesi@wisc.edu) or (608) 262-7399 for more details.

## RESEARCH

### Wisconsin ADRC seeking Veterans to join research studies

It's estimated that in the coming decades, approximately 450,000 Veterans will be diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Veterans, especially combat Veterans, are at a higher risk for developing dementia than the general public.



Health care providers believe the increased risk in Veterans can be attributed to the heart-head connection. Veterans experience high cholesterol, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression at higher rates than the non-military population — all health concerns that increase a person's risk for developing Alzheimer's disease.

While scientists know these differences exist, they do not know why.

The Wisconsin ADRC is enrolling Veterans into Alzheimer's disease and related dementias research studies. If you or someone you know is a Veteran who is interested in joining a research study, contact the recruitment team at (608) 265-0407 or [adrc@medicine.wisc.edu](mailto:adrc@medicine.wisc.edu). ◇

