Fall 2007 Edition

KU Alzheimer & Memory Program NEWSLETTER

Russell Swerdlow, M.D. Joins Alzheimer & Memory Program!

Russell Swerdlow, M.D., joined the University of Kansas, Department of Neurology in September 2007. Dr. Swerdlow comes to the Alzheimer & Memory Program from the University of Virginia.

Dr. Swerdlow is a neurologist and neuroscientist with specialized training in memory disorders and neurodegenerative diseases. In 1996, he helped co-found the Memory Disorders Clinic at the University of Virginia. In addition to seeing patients and participating in Alzheimer's disease clinical trials, Dr. Swerdlow directs a federally funded laboratory that studies the molecular basis of Alzheimer's disease. His research, which has been honored by several national awards, focuses on the role mitochondria (the energy generators of the cell) play in brain aging and neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. He has concentrated on this line of research for the past 20 years.

Dr. Swerdlow is very enthusiastic about joining the KU Alzheimer and Memory Program for personal and professional reasons. For almost a decade, he has been "a close friend and major fan of" Dr. Jeff Burns, the Director of the KU Alzheimer and Memory Program. Dr. Swerdlow's laboratory research program and Dr. Burns' clinical research program both study energy metabolism in aging and in Alzheimer's disease. Their combined research programs will compliment and enhance the Alzheimer's research being conducted on the KU campus.

Along with Dr. Burns and the rest of the KU Alzheimer's disease clinic and research team, Dr. Swerdlow is looking forward to building a nationally recognized center for Alzheimer's disease care and research. In September, Dr. Swerdlow officially joined KUMC as a Professor in the departments of Neurology and Molecular and Integrative Physiology.

Says Dr. Swerdlow: "I'm impressed with and touched by the warm welcome I've received here. It's really wonderful to be part of a program with such great people. The KU Alzheimer and Memory Program is on the rise, and the sky is the limit."

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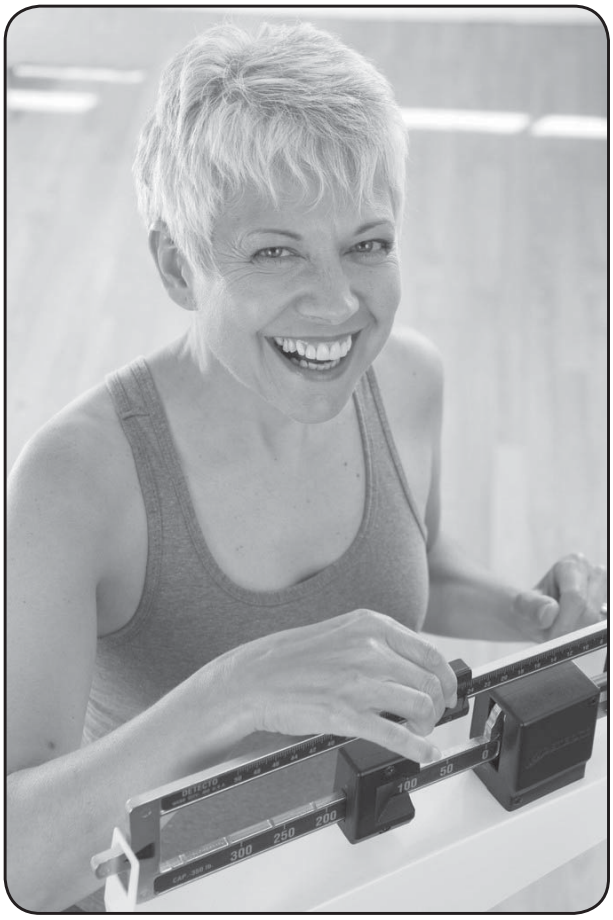
First Annual Participant Appreciation Breakfast!

On Saturday, October 27, 2007, the KU Alzheimer & Memory Program held their first Annual Appreciation Breakfast. Over one hundred research participants and KU Alzheimer & Memory Program staff members attended the event. The breakfast was catered by Dean & Deluca and held in the new KU Biomedical Building's Beller Conference Center. Updates on the program and research were given by the Director, Jeff Burns, M.D. Other speakers at the event included: Heather Anderson, M.D., Russell Swerdlow, M.D., George Thomas, M.D./PhD Candidate, and Stephanie Grinage with KU Endowment. A door prize basket was also given away at the event. Research participants were thanked for their participation and continuous support in the efforts of the KU Alzheimer & Memory Program. If you have further questions about the event, please contact Stacy Picek at 913-588-0602.

Brain Aging Project Data in New Journal Publications!



The KU Alzheimer's & Memory Program's original research project, the Brain Aging Project, is compiling and publishing preliminary results. The two-year longitudinal study, assessing cardiorespiratory fitness in Alzheimer's disease, is published in the journal ***Neurology***, Volume 69, 2007. The title of the publication is "Peripheral Insulin and Brain Volume in Early Alzheimer's Disease," and was authored by: Jeff Burns, Joseph Donnelly, Heather Anderson, Matt Mayo, Luke Spencer-Gardner, George Thomas, Ben Cronk, Ziad Haddad, David Klima, David Hansen, and William Brooks. A second journal publication featuring the Brain Aging Project is in press, entitled, "Cardiorespiratory Fitness in Early-Stage Alzheimer's Disease." It will appear in the journal, Alzheimer's Disease and Associated Disorders, and is authored by: Jeff Burns, Matt Mayo, Heather Anderson, Holly Smith, and Joseph Donnelly.

The KU Brain Aging Project is still enrolling participants for this two-year longitudinal study. For information, or to see if you qualify for this study, please call our research line at 913-588-0555.

Dr. Burns receives KU Achievement in Medicine Award!

Dr. Jeff Burns was honored with the 2007 Early Career Achievement in Medicine award from the KU Medical Alumni Association. This award is presented to alumni who have graduated within the last 20 years from the School of Medicine. The award recognizes individuals who have made distinguished achievements and contributions early in their career to their professions, the KU School of Medicine or the KU Medical Alumni Association. Dr. Burns was honored with this award on September 29, 2007, at the annual Alumni Reunion Weekend Gala at the Overland Park Convention Center.

Among his many accomplishments, Dr. Burns has received three grants from the National Institutes of Health. He has been actively involved in such studies as the ADNI study, which is a high-profile imaging and natural history trial by the NIH and private sector. Dr. Burns has initiated the Brain Aging Project, which examines how structural MRI brain changes relate to various lifestyle factors. He is also the assistant director of the General Clinical Research Center (GCRC), as well as a member of the bi-campus Neurosciences Advisory Group to establish the Kansas University Neuroscience Institute.

Dr. Heather Anderson nominated Dr. Burns for this award. In her nomination letter, Dr. Anderson praised the many accomplishments of Dr. Burns. Dr. Anderson also writes that as the Director of the KU Alzheimer and Memory Clinic, Dr. Burns has "reestablished the University of Kansas Medical Center as a center for Alzheimer's research in the Midwest. As a native Kansan and a graduate of the University of Kansas and the University of Kansas School of Medicine, Dr. Jeffrey Burns is the epitome of what a true Kansan can accomplish. He is devoted to his family and his work and driven to use his knowledge of medicine to improve the health of the elderly in our state."

Congratulations, Dr. Burns!

Measuring Executive Function in Aging and Age-related Neurological Disorders

Joan M. McDowd, PhD
Landon Center on Aging

Until there are cures, significant research efforts should focus on reducing disability among those who have neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's disease. Our current project focuses on executive function (EF) as an aspect of cognition that has important implications for quality of life in older adults. EF in the cognitive domain is broadly defined as "those capacities that enable a person to engage successfully in independent, purposive, self-serving behavior" (Lezak, Howieson, & Loring, 2004, p. 35).

Because of the breadth of this concept of executive function, it is difficult to know how best to measure it. We propose to remedy this situation by very careful study of one of the most common measures of EF, Verbal Fluency. The verbal fluency test requires the production of words according to targeted rules, e.g., names of animals, words beginning with an "f." This task involves abilities such as planning, strategic search of word knowledge, and self-monitoring to avoid repeating oneself, all of which are part of executive function. Our goal is to put together a picture of executive function ability with fluency measures and other measures of cognitive ability, so that we may better understand the cognitive difficulties associated with Alzheimer's disease. Once we have this understanding, we can design and tailor rehabilitation techniques to address the different deficits and help support good quality of life.
We're looking for people with very mild or mild Alzheimer's disease, over the age of 60, to participate in this study. The study itself takes about 2.5 hours, and is conducted in the Landon Center on Aging. Appointments can be set up at your convenience. If you are interested in participating, please call Joan McDowd at 913-588-0646.

Alzheimer & Memory Seminar Series Now Offering CME/CNE Hours!

The KU Alzheimer & Memory Program will be offering Continuing Nursing Education and Continuing Medical Education (CNE/CME) credits for health professionals beginning Tuesday, August 28, 2008. This is in cooperation with the University of Kansas Medical Center Continuing Education department.

The Alzheimer & Memory Seminar Series (AMSS) is a lecture series offered monthly, on the last Tuesday of each month, from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. It is held in the Landon Center on Aging, Room 200. These lectures provide physicians, researchers, nurses, health professionals, and students the opportunity to gain new knowledge and to develop collaborations. New methods of patient care and emerging trends in Alzheimer's disease, aging, and dementia are presented.

For more information about the Alzheimer & Memory Seminar Series (AMSS), please contact Stacy Picek, at 913-588-0602 or spicek@kumc.edu. The schedule of past and future AMSS speakers can be found on our website: http://www.kualzheimer.org/seminars.html.

MEET THE NEW MEMBERS

Zack Zimmerman, B.A.

Zack Zimmerman, B.A. has recently joined our KU Alzheimer and Memory Program team as Research Assistant.

Zack obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree in Human Biology in 2006 with a concentration in Psychology from the University of Kansas in 2006. Since graduation, Zack was employed as a neurophysiology technician performing brainwave studies and neurological evoked potential examinations at an area hospital. Zack will be starting medical school at KU in the fall of 2008 and is interested in neurology and orthopedic surgery.

In his role as Research Assistant, Zack has assumed the role of study coordinator for Dr. Anderson's exercise intervention study, ADEPT. Additionally, Zack is assisting with the KU Brain Aging Project and the Exercise Reliability study. He is also performing MRI brain analysis with Dr. Burns.

Robyn Honea, PhD

Robyn Honea is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Neurology at the University of Kansas Medical Center.

Robyn obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology with a concentration in Neuroscience from Vanderbilt University in 2002. She then worked under a predoctoral training award in the Clinical Brain Disorders Branch at the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) in Washington DC, focusing in brain imaging. She did her doctoral work at the University of Oxford in England in the department of Experimental Psychology, doing work with imaging genetics of mental illness. She also continued research at the NIMH in Washington, D.C. as part of the Graduate Partnerships Program Award. Three years of thesis work was completed at the NIMH in the Unit on Dynamic Imaging Genetics. The focus of her thesis was on using Voxel-Based Morphometry (VBM), Diffusion Tensor Imaging (DTI), and Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) to investigate structural and functional abnormalities associated with mental illness, as well as its underlying genetic mechanisms.

She graduated from Oxford with a DPhil in Neuroscience this past July, 2007. Robyn will be working on the KU Brain Aging study with Dr. Burns, using Voxel-Based Morphometry and other imaging analysis techniques to investigate Alzheimer's disease.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Alzheimer & Memory Seminar Series (AMSS), 4:00-5:00 PM, Landon Center on Aging, Room 200 (Last Tuesday of Each Month, Refreshments Provided)

  Tuesday, November 27th, 2007:
  Mary Jane Youngstrum, MS – "Occupational Therapy and Dementia Care: A home environmental skill-building program for individuals and families."

  Tuesday, January 29th, 2007
  David K. Johnson, Ph.D. – "Cognitive Changes in Alzheimer's and Parkinson's dementias, before and after the onset of clinical symptoms."

  Tuesday, February 26, 2008
  William (Zhiming) Suo, M.D. – "The Roles of GRK Dysfunction in Alzheimer's Disease Pathogenesis."

- Alzheimer & Memory Program Caregiver Support Group, 2:00-3:30 PM, Landon Center on Aging, Room 145 (Second Thursday of Each Month)
  Thursday, December 13th, 2007
  Thursday, January 10th, 2008
  Thursday, February 14th, 2008

- Down Syndrome Dementia Clinic (DSDC), afternoons, Landon Center on Aging Clinic (First Thursday of Each Month). To schedule an appointment, please call: 913-588-6820.
  Thursday, January 3rd , 2008
  Thursday, February 7th, 2008

Contact Information

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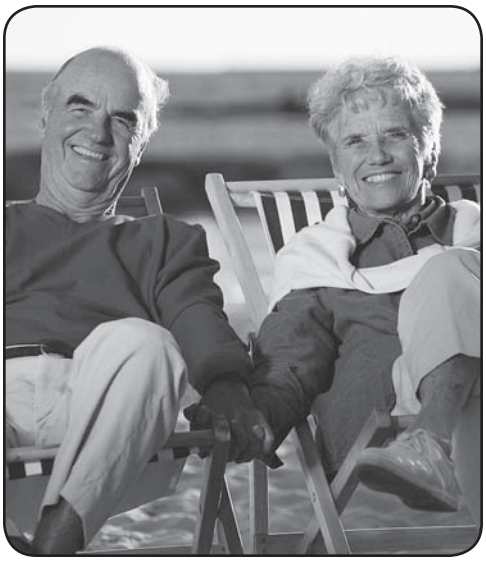
www.KUAlzheimer.org



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