

Transitions



Staying on Track – Despite the Pandemic

by Cheryl Deep

The IOG's approach may be different these days, but its mission to promote successful aging stays the same. Since mid-March, the IOG has postponed, cancelled, re-imagined, resumed and achieved – in some cases greater than before the pandemic. Community engagement has exceeded its pre-Covid-19 goals. Even some research has been able to move ahead safely. “Of course geriatric research must retrench for a while. Our focus is older adults,” Director Peter Lichtenberg said, “the people most vulnerable to Covid-19's severe effects. But in the meantime, the IOG has mastered how to reach thousands of older adults and professionals virtually. I find that deeply satisfying.”

Research

The ELECTRA Study: While many IOG research projects requiring in-person contact with older adults have been suspended, a few have been able to design a new, safe, contact-free approach. Dr. Voyko Kavcic's ELECTRA study now collects data and performs neuropsychological tests by phone. ELECTRA's goal is to see whether non-invasive testing of brainwaves can identify the earliest signs of a decline in memory that leads to dementia or Alzheimer's “It's low-cost, and easy-to-administer and could buy years of additional intervention to help stave off dementia's effects,” Dr. Kavcic said. [Read *When You're Worried about Your Memory* \(p. 1\) to learn more.](#) His lab team is also analyzing data and preparing four journal articles for publication.

The WALLET Study: This project, run by [Dr. Lichtenberg](#), looks at whether early changes in how older adults manage their money may make them more vulnerable to financial exploitation and significant loss of wealth. Participation requires submitting a year's worth of bank statements and two interviews. Statements are now mailed, emailed or retrieved contact-free from the home. All interviews are by phone or video call. Contact Vanessa at vrora@wayne.edu or 313-664-2604 to learn about participating.

Dr. Jessica Robbins: [Dr. Robbins](#) is involved in three studies – Older Adults and the Flint Water Crisis, Gardening and Wellbeing in Detroit, and Aging and Memory in Poland. She is using the suspension of in-person interviews to analyze the huge amounts of data already collected and to write manuscripts. She's seeing optimistic patterns. “This rich data on everyday life reveals the multiple sources of joy and resilience in older adults,” she said. “This is especially important during the pandemic when older adults are often portrayed as only high-risk or vulnerable.”

Dr. Robbins also joined an interdisciplinary research team on racial and ethnic disparities during the pandemic, created a graduate-level writing group and mentored an undergraduate student in WSU's exclusive medical school scholarship program. Her book, *Aging Nationally in Contemporary Poland* will be published in December. [Learn more and pre-order Code RFLR19 for 30% discount.](#)

Community Engagement

SAFE Counseling: Successful Aging thru Financial Empowerment (SAFE) is a free program to educate older adults about financial matters and provide personal coaching and other services to victims of financial fraud and exploitation. SAFE is designed to help older adults and their caregivers. Workshops and presentations about managing money and spotting scams are now offered through Zoom and Facebook live. One-on-one counseling is done by phone or computer. The number of people helped has actually risen now that those in need can access services from home. SAFE has saved or recovered more than \$100,000 for victims of scams and identity theft to date. [Learn more about SAFE.](#)

Partnerships & Trainings:

The IOG educated 7,986 healthcare professionals and 1,607 older adults this year – despite having to cancel all events from March 10 through May 12. One hundred and five programs were presented to healthcare professionals; 54 held through Zoom. The IOG's 17 partners have been highly pleased with the attendance and engagement. Logging in from home opened the program to attendees whose schedule or location kept them from participating in the past. “The online format has worked so well, and older adults have embraced it so readily, that I'm sure we'll continue offering a portion of our trainings this way even after the pandemic has ended,” said Donna MacDonald, IOG's director of outreach.

A New eNewsletter: The IOG launched [Caregiver Connection](#) in late March as a digital resource for non-professional caregivers of older adults. About 2,000 caregivers, most in the Detroit area, receive it monthly. Readers have expressed thanks for the personal stories of caring for persons with Alzheimer's, the free classes and resources, fraud alerts, and the chance to help with research. [Subscribe](#)

COVID-19's Impact . . .

On Older African Americans: Dr. Kavcic added questions to his ELECTRA project enhanced screening to learn about cognitive functioning during the pandemic He has also included “health belief” questions to capture the attitudes of older African Americans toward vaccination. Data from 75 participants has been collected.

On Older Adults: A brief, anonymous survey conducted online to learn more about social and psychological reactions to the crisis. [Covid-19 Experience Survey](#)

On the Financial Exploitation of Older Adults: The multi-state research team is working to identify how older adults may have been subjected to increased scams and financial abuse during the pandemic and the actions they took, if any. The goal is to better understand how to reduce the risk and harm of financial abuse and exploitation. [Learn more](#)



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