

K-State helps the aging population in all facets of life

BY MARIA NILGES '06

Whether it's through drama or medicine, K-State researchers and professors make the lives of the elderly better and increase longevity.

Duy Hua, university distinguished professor in chemistry, has been involved in Alzheimer's research at K-State for almost nine years. He and his team are working to find a drug that blocks the formation of the amyloid plaque that forms in the brain which causes Alzheimer's disease.

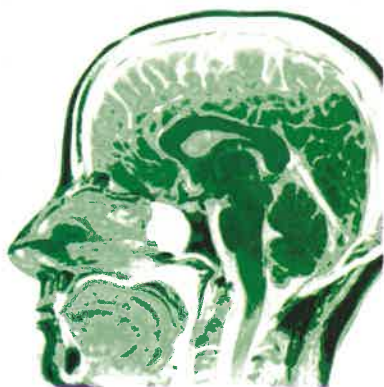
Hua is hoping to find the root cause of the disease and stop it, rather than just treating it.

"We are working with the real culprit," he said. "However, there are



Erin Jeschke '02, K-State Alumni Association

Left and above: Residents at Manhattan's Meadowlark Hills Retirement Community participate in a storytelling program led by a K-State graduate student.



still a lot of unknowns. The brain is not easy to study.”

Hua studies the effects of Alzheimer’s on the protein, cell system in mice. He’s in collaboration with the University of California–Davis, where the mice are housed. The K-State team designs the drugs, then the tests are done at UC–Davis. The two-month-old transgenic mice are treated with the drug for two weeks. Then the brain is analyzed for Alzheimer’s amyloid plaques. The National Institutes of Health has funded this four-year research project.

A patent application of the compound was awarded and the goal is to eventually have the drug on clinical

trial. There are currently drugs on the market that improve memory loss, but they have negative side effects such as liver damage.

Hua knows how horrific this disease is and how it affects everyone around the patient.

“Alzheimer’s is a devastating disease. A person with Alzheimer’s is diagnosed and can live up to nine years,” he said. “The person cannot recognize people and directions. All this time, he or she needs constant care.”

While Hua improves lives from a medical aspect, last fall semester Sally Bailey, theater professor, directed a storytelling program at Meadowlark Hills Retirement Community in Manhattan, Kan.

The group learned how to tell an effective story and then go to elementary schools to work in interactive groups with students.

“This is different than Bingo,” Bailey said. “The (Meadowlark Hills) residents are creatively involved and give back to the community.”

Bailey and her eight graduate students worked with the residents once a week throughout the semester to develop their confidence and practice their stories. Each member chose their own story, and Bailey said each was unique to them.

“It could be a historical story about growing up in Kansas, or it could be a fairy tale,” she said.

Bailey and the Manhattan Arts Center are matching up residents with a teacher who is looking for a certain topic in their classroom. Hoping the program will be successful, Bailey is already working to organize a storytelling festival.

“It really benefits all involved,” she said. “It changes students’ perspectives about being creative when you’re older.”

K-State also has academic programs available to prepare students for careers dealing with the elderly. The university employs 35 gerontology



Courtesy photos

with a vast array of perspectives. They put their perspective on message boards, and it turns into an open and rewarding program,” she said. “Someone contributes what they know and others chime in with their expertise.”

The person-centered care model of elderly care is a growing focus throughout K-State. Doll works to find grants related to how to find better ways to set up nursing homes. She sees Meadowlark Hills Retirement Community as a leader in implementing this model.

The Center on Aging opened a satellite campus onsite at Meadowlark Hills in May. This will allow for an efficient way to coordinate internships and conduct research.

When a professor teaches at K-State, he or she can take their students there and have them interact with residents. Doll hopes this experience will prove invaluable to students when learning real-life aspects of aging.

“I can tell you what’s in the books,” she said. “They can tell you what it’s like experiencing a hearing loss, for example.”

K-State aids the aging population through research, new medicine and implemented programs.

For tips, refer to the information to the right. 🐾

K-STATE ADVICE FOR ELDERLY

HUMAN NUTRITION

Aging doesn’t have to equal a change in health. However, nutritional needs change as one becomes older, said professor of human nutrition Tina Remig, a registered dietician.

Despite a positive trend that 70-year-olds are much healthier today than in previous generations, aging adults could improve their diet to meet their changing nutritional needs.

Some examples Remig gives were be cautious about consuming excess calories, consume adequate protein, eat enough fiber daily and get adequate hydration.

COMPANION ANIMALS

Studies have shown a pet can bring both emotional and health benefits. But K-State veterinarian in clinical sciences Dr. Matt Riegel said getting a pet should not be an impulse decision and several criteria should be considered before buying one.

When choosing a pet, take into consideration the pet’s adult size, activity level, behavior, exercise requirements, routine grooming demands and interaction with children and health care givers.

Considering these and other criteria when choosing a pet can avoid the mistake that the pet becomes a burden and nuisance instead of a companion.

GARDENING FOR LIFE

Walking and gardening are the two major leisure-time physical activities for those 65 years and older in the United States, said horticulture professor Candice Shoemaker ’82.

“We are told we should have 60 minutes — recently increased from 30 minutes — of physical activity most days of the week, something that can become more challenging to achieve as we grow older,” she said. “Gardening, a moderate physical activity for older adults, can be used to meet this physical activity recommendation.”