



THE **Continuum**

VOL. 2 • ISSUE 2 • SPRING '07

New leadership at the Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center



Dr. Ronald Shorr, the new director of the VA GRECC, will have an active leadership role overseeing the UF Institute on Aging's clinical programs.

Ronald Shorr, M.D., arrived in Gainesville in early January to lead the Institute on Aging's clinical programs.

A board-certified geriatrician and internist, Shorr will assume three roles in his new position — director of the Veterans Affairs Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center (GRECC), associate director of the IOA and professor and chief of the division of geriatric medicine in the department of aging and geriatrics.

In his new position, Shorr will help unite the shared mission of the VA and UF — providing full-service geriatrics care to seniors.

Shorr, who comes to Gainesville from the department of preventive medicine at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis, will use all his skills as he begins his work in his new role.

"I moonlight as a jazz musician," Shorr said. "I have learned that you must listen to what the band is already playing in order to make music. So as I approach this position, I'm going to go on a listening tour of the IOA and GRECC."

The Veterans Health Administration initiated a strategy in the

New leadership, continued on page 3

Welcome from IOA Director Marco Pahor

In this issue we focus on the importance of providing specialized geriatric care in our community.

Shands at the University of Florida in conjunction with the North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System has had a long-standing reputation for excellence in providing geriatric care to veterans and community members.

This partnership, started in the 1970s, continues to grow under the aegis of the Institute on Aging. To develop a "one-stop shopping" opportunity for the delivery of geriatric health care, UF's department of aging and geriatrics incorporated UF's geriatrics division, which was formerly housed in UF's department of medicine. This effectively brought together UF and VA students, faculty and clinicians who specialize in providing senior care.

We envision a continuity of this mission through the

training of the next generation of geriatric physicians through our fellowship program and clerkships in geriatrics through a partnership with UF and the Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center at the VA.

This integration of services addresses one of the fundamental goals of the UF Institute on Aging — to foster the development of a cross-campus system of integrated health care for older people — and will ensure the best quality of care for elders in our community by developing health-care delivery in the context of state-of-the-art research and education in gerontology.



Marco Pahor, M.D.



A physical therapist assists a patient at the VA's Gait and Balance Clinic.

Clinical Care – the third GRECC mission

The third component of GRECC's mission is clinical care. GRECC clinicians fulfill their clinical effort through service on three VA units:

- **Geriatric Evaluation and Management Unit**
- **Palliative Care Unit**
- **The Gait and Balance Clinic**

The Geriatric Evaluation and Management Unit, or GEM, and the Palliative Care Unit, or PCU, are located on the third floor of the Nursing Home Care Unit Building. Each of these units has an interdisciplinary team dedicated to working with frail elders to help them achieve their goals for health care.

The 16-bed GEM selects patients with functional impairment and rehabilitative needs. Over an average four-week stay, patient needs are comprehensively assessed and addressed, with the goal of discharging them back to their home.

The Gait and Balance Clinic uses an interdisciplinary team of a physical therapist, physician, nurse and pharmacist to evaluate and treat older patients at high risk for falls.

The eight-bed PCU selects patients who are in the terminal phase of illness and addresses physical, emotional and family needs. Average length of stay is one or two weeks.

A geriatric fellow, attending physician and two medical residents provide knowledgeable and compassionate medical care on the GEM and PCU. 🌿

IOA Announcements

Miho K. Bautista, M.D., a clinical assistant professor and co-director of the geriatric clerkship, recently passed the American Board of Internal Medicine Specialty Board in Geriatric Medicine to become a board-certified geriatrician.

This spring we welcome a number people to the department of aging and geriatrics.

Jameson DuPree, laboratory technician, **Hazel Lees, M.S.**, laboratory technician, and **Maria Seabra, M.S.**, senior laboratory technician, have joined the division of biology and aging.

Silvia Giovannini, M.D., is welcomed to the department as a postdoctoral research associate from the Universita Cattolica del sacro Cuore in Rome, where she is currently a geriatric fellow.

Predictors of Adherence in LIFE

There is national evidence of a decline in physical activity with age and an association between inactivity and increased risk for physical disability. The Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders (LIFE) Pilot is a randomized controlled trial that was designed to examine the feasibility of conducting a large multi-center trial on the effects of increasing physical activity in sedentary, functionally compromised older adults to delay or prevent the onset of mobility disability. One of the objectives was to examine predictors of adherence to physical activity.

The community setting for the pilot included institution-based and home-based physical activity for 213 men (31.1%) and women (68.9%) with an average age of 76.5 years who were at risk for disability. Adherence to physical activity interventions was not related to differences in demographic profiles. Similarly, there was not strong, consistent evidence that adherence is related to comorbidities, level of physical functioning, physical symptoms, or even cognitive processes related to functioning and physical activity



that exist prior to the onset of an intervention.

The results were heartening in that the physical activity intervention appears to have been well tolerated by diverse groups of older adults. The role of prior behavior in predicting later adherence to the program underscores the importance of anticipating it and developing advance interventions for its treat. 🌿

Bhaskar Malayappan, Ph.D., comes to the department as a postdoctoral research associate from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Va., where he was a postdoctoral associate.

Todd Manini, Ph.D., joins the department as a research assistant professor. He will study energy expenditure in late life and design interventions to prevent the onset of age-related disabling conditions.

Keri Merchant has joined the department of aging and geriatrics, division of geriatric medicine, where she serves as division manager and coordinator of the geriatric clinic.

Jinze Xu, Ph.D., will join the department as a postdoctoral research associate. She is currently a research fellow with the Mayo Clinic researching lipid metabolism and insulin resistance.

mid-1970s to focus attention on the aging veteran population, to increase the basic knowledge of aging, to transfer that knowledge to health-care providers and to improve the quality of senior care. A cornerstone of this strategy has been the development of GRECCs. Gainesville has one of 21 such centers of excellence currently operating in the nation.

The Institute on Aging's three-part mission also involves patient care, education and research. One of the key components for enacting this mission comes from its relationship with the GRECC.

The work of the IOA naturally lends itself to the mission of the GRECC and vice versa, Shorr said. He said his goal for GRECC is to help translate some of the more mechanistic research findings that come out of the Institute on Aging so they

can be applied to patients.

"A guy like me can take that research and translate it to apply to the care of our patients with problems like frailty, which is one problem we deal with that is linked to aging," Shorr said.

Shorr will also oversee the IOA's clinical operations, including the geriatricians at the University of Florida Physicians Senior Care of Tower Hill clinic.

Shorr holds a master's degree in epidemiology and completed a postdoctoral fellowship in pharmacoepidemiology. His research interests include the appropriate use of and adverse effects of medications in older adults. He is currently the principal investigator of an NIH grant to test whether proximity alarms reduce fall risk in acute care. ¶

VA GRECC educational activities

So clinicians can better care for their patients and seniors can better understand the aging process, the Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center at the VA joins with the University of Florida's College of Medicine and the Institute on Aging to provide various educational activities.

The courses, lectures and other educational offerings target different audiences in three general areas: career development of younger clinicians and researchers, training of health-care providers and outreach activities in the community.

To enhance development of research, clinical and leadership skills among students, trainees and fellows, UF and the GRECC provide a variety of interdisciplinary learning experiences, including weekly seminars, workshops on writing grants and manuscripts, journal clubs, distance learning experiences, online activities, informal networking events and a two-week geriatric clerkship for fourth-year medical students.

The GRECC's efforts to improve the knowledge and skills of faculty and staff at UF and the VA include two weekly interdisciplinary aging seminar series that focus on research and clinical topics. Special education events such as the Whittington Lecture series, educational workshops and regional/national conferences on geriatrics take place throughout the year.

Another aim is to improve the knowledge of older adults and to enhance understanding of the aging population by health professionals and consumers in the community. To do this, GRECC initiated a campaign to educate the public about health strategies to reduce the risk of stroke, produced a video to empower patients with congestive heart failure to manage their disease, and is currently developing educational materials to help older adults readjust after returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. ¶

The geriatric imperative – Training a new generation of geriatricians

In 2002, the University of Florida declared in its newly adopted strategic plan that addressing the social and medical problems associated with aging was one of its seven top priorities. This significant commitment cleared the way for the Institute on Aging, under the leadership of Marco Pahor, M.D., to make some new educational initiatives.

Today the UF College of Medicine's Department of Aging and Geriatrics and the VA's Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center combine resources to provide an intensive interdisciplinary learning experience for medical students through a fourth-year clerkship and for postdoctoral physicians through a geriatric fellowship.

The geriatric clerkship provides fourth-year medical students a two-week rotation at one of four unique locations: the North Florida/South Georgia VA in Gainesville, the Shands at UF Rehab Hospital, the Transitional Care Unit of Shands Jacksonville and the River Garden Hebrew Home. During their rotations, students are responsible for up to six patients in their facility and are required to work as part of an interdisciplinary team. Communication is a key element of the learning experience.

The geriatric fellowship is administered through the VA GRECC and is designed to train physicians in clinical care of older adults through a core curriculum that provides basic knowledge of the biological and psychological aspects of aging. Firsthand experience is gained in clinical care, research, teaching and administration.

John Meuleman, M.D., directs both programs. For more info, please visit <http://www.aging.ufl.edu> and click on either Geriatric Fellowship or Fourth-Year Geriatric Clerkship. ¶

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Giving for a healthier, more independent tomorrow

Good health and independence make for quality living, especially as we age. The University of Florida is committed to leading in research, education and patient care through the Institute on Aging.

You can invest in a healthier and more independent future for you and your loved ones by investing in the Institute on Aging. Your support educates future geriatricians and health-care providers for older persons, generates critical resources for our world-class faculty to conduct cutting-edge research and creates a legacy for UF to remain a leader in providing a healthier and more fulfilling tomorrow for us all.

Please contact Troy Munn, director of development for the Institute on Aging, at 352-265-7227 or toll free at 888-374-2867 or e-mail tmunn@aging.ufl.edu if you would like to make a gift or would like information regarding planned gifts that provide tax incentives and annual payments to you.

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