The UF Institute on Aging is expanding its footprint so that thousands more of Florida’s citizens can take part in clinical and translational research studies aimed at improving the health and independence of older adults. The institute will establish a 4,200-square-foot clinical research unit within UF’s roughly 106,000-square-foot Research and Academic Center at Lake Nona, which will be completed by the summer of 2012.

“The new unit gives us the ability to reach beyond Gainesville to recruit study participants,” said Marco Pahor, M.D., director of the Institute on Aging. “Being able to involve larger numbers of people from a wider geographical radius will improve the quality of our research data and the soundness of our findings.”

Residents of Orlando and its environs will be able to take part in future Institute on Aging studies of older adults. Current research includes the LIFE study, to assess whether physical activity or health education can prevent movement disability; The TTrial, to test whether giving testosterone to men who have depleted levels can help improve health and physical, sexual and mental function; and the ASPREE study, to determine whether daily low-dose aspirin can help stave off disabling conditions and increase life expectancy among healthy seniors.

Community members also will benefit from potential cross-disciplinary collaborations with researchers in the neighboring Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute.

Orlando, here we come!

Robert Hromas, M.D.

Robert Hromas, M.D.
VA Service Directed Project
Connie Uphold, Ph.D., A.R.N.P., an associate professor of aging and geriatric research and education director of the Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Centers at the VA Medical Center, has received a four-year, $607,800 Veterans Affairs Service Directed Project Award for her project titled “Web-Based Informational Materials for Caregivers of Veterans Post-Stroke.” Uphold also has co-authored and co-edited the book A LifeLine for Stroke Caregivers: Information and Resources to Keep Your Head Above Water, published by the Government Printing Office. Additional resources for caregivers of post-stroke veterans are at http://www.orc.research.va.gov/rescue.

VA Career Development-2
Joshua Yarrow, Ph.D., a postdoctoral associate in the Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Centers at the VA Medical Center and in the UF College of Health and Human Performance, has received a 2011-2013 VA Career Development-2 Award of $498,000. His research project, under the mentorship of Steve Borst, Ph.D., is titled “Testosterone and Spinal Cord Injury.”

Best wishes to Peggy Smith, who retired in December 2010 after 15 years of employment with the University of Florida and four years with the Department of Aging. Peggy, we will miss your enthusiasm and creativity!

Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders (LIFE) is Ahead of Recruitment Timeline

Congratulations to the recruitment teams at all study sites for the outstanding results!

The UF Institute on Aging is continuing to recruit participants at a steady clip for the Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders, or LIFE study, announced in the Spring 2010 edition of Continuum.

The LIFE study examines whether physical activity or health education can prevent or delay major movement disability among older adults. The six-year, controlled trial of 1,600 older adults at risk of mobility disability is being carried out at eight field sites around the country.

As of February 2011 — two months ahead of schedule — 920 participants in all have been assigned to intervention groups.

Pennington Biomedical Research Center leads recruitment with 150 participants. Florida is next, with 146 participants, and Wake Forest has 130. In close pursuit are Yale University, the University of Pittsburgh, Tufts University and Northwestern University. Stanford University, which has a relatively high percentage of lower-functioning participants and a high goal for minority recruitment, has assigned 84 participants.

Racial and ethnic minority recruitment is being closely monitored. Across all sites, 162 nonwhite, racial minorities, or 18 percent, have been assigned. Northwestern, Wake Forest, Pennington and Stanford are leaders in minority recruitment.

The LIFE Study team anticipates that the New Year will bring renewed interest in the study, and is devising strategies for increasing interest among ethnic minorities.

For more information, please call 352-273-5919 and ask about “The LIFE Study.”

David Clark, Sc.D. is a researcher at the Malcom Randall VA Medical Center’s Brain Rehabilitation Research Center, and a Junior Pepper Scholar of the UF Claude D. Pepper Older Americans Independence Center. His research focuses on enhancing walking capability among people who have restricted mobility, such as older adults and those who have suffered a stroke. In particular, he is investigating how changes in the nervous system contribute to weakness and impaired movement. The work is supported by a career development award from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and a pilot grant from the UF Pepper Center.

Joe Nocera, Ph.D. has been promoted to a faculty position at the lecturer rank in the Department of Aging and Geriatric Research. He is also a research scientist with the Department of Veterans Affairs and a Junior Scholar of the UF Pepper Center. Previously, he completed postdoctoral fellowships in the department of aging and geriatric medicine and the department of neurology. Nocera did his doctoral studies in kinesiology at the University of Georgia, and his master’s work at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Dr. Nocera’s research includes studying the relationship between cognitive function and physical function with emphasis on executive control, locomotion and balance.
Translational Research is Key to Success at UF’s Pepper Older Americans Independence Center

Studies in rats help point human studies in the right direction.

Pre-clinical and clinical researchers work hand in hand at UF’s Claude D. Pepper Older Americans Independence Center to study the basic biology behind the causes of age-related muscle loss, called sarcopenia. A good example of this kind of partnership is the work of junior scholars Stephanie Wohlgemuth, Ph.D., and Steven Anton, Ph.D., with the mentorship of Christiaan Leeuwenburgh, Ph.D., and Michael Perri, Ph.D.

Usually, during aging, the muscles of rats show decreased activity of genes involved in a process called autophagy, which serves as the “housekeeper” of cells by clearing away damaged components. Aging impairs the cells’ ability to stay debris-free, and as a result they no longer function properly, or are destroyed.

To investigate ways to spur the cleanup process, the researchers put rats on a lifelong low-calorie diet and allowed them to exercise voluntarily. The rats’ muscles showed increased activity of biological markers of the cleanup process.

With those results in hand, the researchers wanted to see if they would get similar results in people. They carried out a clinical study to examine how the muscles of elderly, overweight women might respond to a six-month regimen of exercise and weight loss. In these women, markers of cleanup and of the function of mitochondria — the energy-producing centers of cells — were elevated, compared with levels detected in a control group. The two sets of results show how animal studies inform clinical studies by pointing to important biological markers that might be involved in helping older adults maintain independence in their daily activities.

Welcome to Our New Faculty and Staff:
Yohannes Endeshaw, M.D., M.P.H., associate professor, geriatric medicine and clinical research; Ryan O’Mara, assistant project manager, LIFE study; Barbara Williamson, program assistant, LIFE study; Kelly Gamble, research scientist, clinical research; Kimberly Case, study coordinator, clinical research; Pam Dubiak, graduate assistant, clinical research; Charles Gay, interventionist, LIFE study; David Clark, Sc.D., Pepper Junior Scholar; Joe Nocera, Ph.D., adjunct lecturer; Vasu Lakkimsetti, M.D., courtesy faculty; Emily Chappelle, screener; Kyle Jersey, phlebotomist; Anna Hernandez, grants assistant; Kathleen Jett, Ph.D., G.N.P., nurse practitioner, Oak Hammock.

Opportunities to Participate in Research Studies:
If you are interested in participating in a current or future Institute on Aging study, you can now enroll in our Institutional Review Board-approved recruitment registry. To enroll or obtain additional information, contact Cardie Dielschneider at cdielschneider@aging.ufl.edu or call 352-273-5919.

New Positions:
Several faculty positions are now open, and more will be posted soon. For employment opportunities, please e-mail Camelia Pascu at cpascu@aging.ufl.edu.

Yohannes Endeshaw, M.D., M.P.H.
recently joined the Department of Aging and Geriatric Research and the Institute on Aging as associate professor. Previously, he held a similar position at Emory University School of Medicine. He is board-certified in internal, geriatric and sleep medicine and has a strong record in research and publications.

After earning his medical degree at Addis Ababa University, in Ethiopia, he did his residency in medicine at the Medical College of Virginia. Later, he completed a clinical and research fellowship in the Division of Geriatric Medicine and Gerontology at Emory University School of Medicine, and additional sleep medicine training at the Emory University Sleep Disorders Center.

Dr. Endeshaw was an attending physician at Emory’s Wesley Woods Center and Sleep Disorders Center, Grady Memorial Hospital’s Memory Clinic, and the Atlanta VA Medical Center’s GRECC/Sleep Clinic. Before that, he was an assistant professor and co-director of the primary care clerkship program in the health care sciences department at the George Washington University. He also holds a master’s in public health and a certificate in international health from the University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine.

Dr. Endeshaw’s research focuses on how sleep disorders — and related treatments — affect daily functioning and quality of life among older adults. That includes looking at the connection between sleep-disordered breathing and other ailments that affect the elderly.
Unlocking life’s mysteries – particularly the secrets of how long and how well we live – is the distinct focus of the University of Florida’s Institute on Aging. Our scientists and physicians are dedicated to achieving better understanding of the mechanisms of aging and how we can maintain or enhance our physical independence and cognitive abilities.

Private philanthropy is so essential to our work. Your gift, regardless of size, can make the critical difference in funding new scientific endeavors. Imagine discoveries that fuel positive cellular changes; identify new therapies that help rehabilitate aging bones and joints; or uncover additional pharmaceutical allies. Private philanthropy makes all this and much more possible.

To learn more about how you can invest in a healthier and more independent tomorrow for us all, please contact Mary Ann Kiely at 352-273-9620 or email mkiely@ufl.edu.