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Virginia Center on Aging

2018

The Year in the Rear-View Mirror

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Recommended Citation

Ansello, E. (2018). The Year in the Rear-View Mirror. *Age in Action*, 33(1).

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The Year in the Rear-View Mirror

By

Edward F. Ansello, PhD

The year 2018 is our 40th. Governor John Dalton signed the bill enacting us in March 1978. We have, since then, employed many dedicated faculty and staff and partnered with hundreds of agencies, coalitions, and businesses to help older Virginians and their families to enjoy the best of their years.

Our programs and activities have evolved over time but we have remained true to the charges given us in the Code of Virginia, essentially to conduct interdisciplinary studies, including training practitioners and offering educational opportunities for older adults, conducting research on and advancing knowledge about dementia, and serving as an information resource to those committed to the well-being of older adults.

Our current operations feature four program areas: abuse in later life (domestic violence and elder abuse); dementia research; geriatrics and gerontology education; and lifelong learning. Here are samplings of what we did in calendar 2017.

Abuse in Later Life. We have focused for many years on bettering the community's response to abuse in later life. With the valuable assistance of Virginia's Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), we have worked with our community partners to strengthen the knowledge and skills of law enforcement, Commonwealth's Attorneys, multidisciplinary team members, social services providers, coalitions, government agencies, volunteers, and others to work collaboratively to recognize, prevent, and respond to this abuse. DCJS has funded continuing projects on family violence and elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. We are the lead agency in the Central Virginia Task Force on Domestic Violence in Later Life, which has funding from V-STOP (Virginia Services, Training, Officers, Prosecution) in the Violence against Women grant program, administered by DCJS. DOJ supported a completed project to establish a community response for victims in Southwest Virginia. In late 2017 DCJS awarded us support for a project to enhance the skills of circuit and district court judges in abuse in later life cases; we'll be offering one-day educational workshops in three different regions of the state this spring for some 60 judges, emphasizing, among other things, the impact of abuse in later life on our communities, the dynamics of abuse; the unique needs of older victims, and the importance of multidisciplinary collaboration.

We are also in the middle of a two-year DCJS-funded project ending December 2018 to develop: a) an executive-level training presentation on law enforcement response to abuse in later life (ALL) and deliver it to 250 Virginia police chiefs and sheriffs at two annual conferences; b) a supervisor-level training presentation on the law enforcement response to ALL and deliver it to 50 attendees at First Line Supervisors Training School; and c) a one-day (8-hour) training to 40 officers in four regions of Virginia on identification, response, and investigation of ALL, to include domestic, sexual and dating violence, stalking, neglect, and trauma-informed response.

In 2017, we exceeded our goal with executive level training and have made substantial progress with supervisors and regional training of officers.

Dementia. We have administered the Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund (ARDRAF) since its enactment in 1982. It is, arguably, the most effective state-funded vehicle in the United States to investigate the causes, consequences, and treatment of dementing illnesses. During calendar 2017, we solicited, screened and enabled third party-reviews of many proposals for innovative seed or pilot research, that is, projects whose findings can lead to larger federal or foundation grants. We made seven awards on a range of scientific topics: a) UVA: empathic transfer of postoperative cognitive dysfunction as a consequence of neuroinflammation; b) Va. Tech: Identification of compounds that can protect neurons by blocking the tau oligomer formation characteristic of neurofibrillary tangles in Alzheimer's Disease (AD); c) Va. Tech Carillion Research Institute: How amyloid deposits facilitate the development of AD by impairing the regulation of blood flow; d) VCU: The effectiveness of a neuroinflammatory inhibitor that has potential for treating AD; e) VCU: Validation of an *in vitro* neurovascular AD tissue model to facilitate drug discovery; f) VCU: Establishing a platform for generating the alpha-synuclein protein found in the Lewy bodies that characterize Parkinson's disease; and g) VCU-Shenandoah Family Practice Residency: Studying the increase in the off-label use of risky medications (e.g., lithium and anticonvulsant mood stabilizers) to treat dementia symptoms.

In the 35 years of ARDRAF (1982-2017), we have awarded 173 competitive seed grants, to 24 non-profit recipient organizations, at an average award of \$24,300, for a total of \$4.23M. They, in turn, have subsequently obtained over \$39M in related funding from non-Virginia sources, for an average return of \$9.39 for every \$1.00 that the General Assembly has appropriated to ARDFRAF.

Geriatrics/Gerontology Education. Our Geriatric Training and Education (GTE) focuses on workforce development across Virginia. Agencies and organizations submit needs-based training proposals which we screen through third party reviewers. Training topics are varied, as needs are locally identified. In calendar 2017 we awarded 12 GTE projects, including: Visual Arts Center of Richmond: *Training Artist Educators to Lead Creative Aging*; Alzheimer's Association, Central and Western Virginia Chapter (Charlottesville): *Creative Expressions in Dementia Care: A one day training workshop for sustainability of arts programming in four rural regions*; The Riverside Center for Excellence in Aging and Lifelong Health (Williamsburg): *Training Geriatric Workforce in the Benefits of Therapeutic Horsemanship for Better Dementia Care*; Lucy Corr Foundation (Chesterfield): *A Peer Interdisciplinary Educational Training Approach to Oral Health Care for Direct Care Providers*; Capital Caring (Falls Church): *Building upon the Success of the Alternative Curriculum for Virginia POST Facilitator Certification*; George Mason University (Arlington): *Advance Care Planning in Medicare/Medicaid Funded Agencies: A Culturally Competent Training*; Aging Together (Culpeper): *Helping throughout the Journey of Dementia: Understanding Progression and Providing the Best Care*; and Arlington Community Foundation: *Advance Care Planning Workshops and Facilitator Training in Arlington*.

The Virginia Geriatric Education Center (VGEC), a federally-funded consortium of VCU, UVA, and EVMS that we lead with faculty from dentistry, medicine, nursing, OT, pharmacy, PT, and

social work, continues its work of building interprofessional geriatrics. The VGEC's initiatives touch all regions of Virginia and beyond, having welcomed practitioners and educators from other states and other countries in its training programs. These programs include the 200-hour, September through June Faculty Development Program (FDP) and the 24-hour Evidence Based Practice (EBP) program on preventing the recurrence of falls. In June 2017 we graduated our largest FDP class of health care professionals who have academic teaching credentials, ensuring that they will "pass the torch" to their colleagues and students, sharing their knowledge and skills.

Lifelong Learning. We have offered learning experiences for older adults across Virginia since 1979, when we established sites for noncredit, college-like courses under the Elderhostel umbrella. Elderhostel has become Road Scholar, a network of program providers in North America and more than 100 other countries across the world. Road Scholar programs are typically four-six days in length, and may now include physical experiences to complement the academic. We offer a range of Road Scholar growth opportunities at hotels in Big Meadows, Fredericksburg, Harrisonburg, Richmond, and Staunton, attracting 494 learners from Virginia and elsewhere in 2017. Our VCU Road Scholar is the leading affiliated provider in Virginia and a top performer among providers across the United States.

We also conduct the member-driven Lifelong Learning Institute (LLI) in Chesterfield County, which we co-founded and co-sponsor with Chesterfield County Public Schools and Chesterfield County to serve mid-life and older adults. In 2017, the LLI offered 645 daytime, nonresidential, college-level courses and related activities classes, taught by 218 volunteer instructors across three 16-week sessions. We attracted 2,573 learners (a single student may be counted up to three times, i.e., once in each of the sessions). The LLI in 2017 had a total of 1,261 members, all Virginians, representing 47 different zip codes and the following locations: Amelia, Charlotte, Chesterfield, Colonial Heights, Cumberland, Dinwiddie, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, King William, New Kent, Nottoway, Petersburg, Powhatan, Prince William, and Richmond.

Other activities. Beyond our four program areas, we continue our work on aging with lifelong disabilities, as a leading member of the Area Planning and Services Committee (APSC). It hosted highly successful, informative events in 2017: its statewide June 2017 conference around the theme of *A Balanced Life: Making Meaningful Connections* and its November workshop for service providers on *Exploring Diversity across Culture, Spirituality, and Disability*. We maintain, of course, our research translation and community engagement work on a dozen coalitions, boards, and ad hoc initiatives.