



Newsletter of 'Using our Brains' Donor Program Issue 9 November 2004

From the Director



Prof. Clive Harper with Dr. T.K. Li, Director of NIAAA, at the Mannheim Conference

In September Therese Garrick and I attended an international Congress that dealt with alcohol-related problems – particularly brain damage (the International Society for Biomedical Research in Alcoholism). As most of you realise, this is one of the main interests of the NSW Tissue Resource Centre and many of the banked brains are used for these studies. Other conditions that we are interested in are schizophrenia and bipolar disorders. We have quite a few cases of Alzheimer's disease, motor neurone disease and some cases of multiple sclerosis. As you all know, the main aim of UoB is to collect normal or control cases that can be compared with these diseased brains.

The conference was held in Mannheim, which is about an hour's train ride from Frankfurt. It is a pretty city but not as nice as its sister city Heidelberg where we were taken for several of the official functions in the evenings. Heidelberg is at the junction of the Neckar and Rhine rivers and is very famous for its beautiful castle. The University in Heidelberg was founded by Elector Ruprecht I of the Palatinate and chartered by Pope Urban VI in 1386. The professors used to have the right to store and sell wine to raise funds for the University – I like the idea!

The conference was a great success both scientifically and socially. I had organised a symposium that focused on the causes of brain shrinkage in people who drink excessively. These conferences give us a chance of meeting up with other researchers from countries around the world and to find out about the latest research. We had a number of conversations with groups who wish to access more tissues from the TRC for research. I also spent some time with the senior US government administrators from the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, who help support the TRC and UoB. They seemed to be very pleased with our progress and the support that you, THE DONORS, are giving us. Therese played a key role by promoting the next international conference that is to be held in Sydney in 2006. She gave away hundreds of small koalas with the conference information – they were a great hit!

Although Heidelberg University is old compared to what we are used to in Australia it is nothing compared to our next stop – Egypt. The pyramids in Giza are nearly 5000 years old – we were overwhelmed by their grandeur and by the extraordinary engineering feats achieved in those days. It is one thing to see it on television but another to see it 'live'. There were some worries about security, especially when the bomb went off in the Hilton hotel but I had my trusty guide and protector with me – my wife and TRC Clinical Research Nurse.

Clive Harper

The Healthy Brain Program

The healthy brain program aims to assist Australians to keep their brains healthy into old age. People are living longer and the prevalence of degenerative brain disorders is increasing. This series is a continuation of the Brain Foundation's 'pointers to a healthy brain' which we started in the March 2004 issue of 'Brain Matters'.

Enjoy Physical Activity

Exercise daily if possible. Set exercise priorities and stick to them. Regular exercise reduces depression and reduces cardiovascular risk factors; even a simple walk lets you think freely. Choose an activity you enjoy.

Some exercise states may produce euphoria. Even 12 minutes of exercise (to 85% maximum heart rate) release serotonin, dopamine and noradrenaline

Exercise in the evening after a stressful day, rather than early in the day.

Take exercise opportunities – climb stairs instead of taking the lift, schedule regular five-minute walking breaks, park your car away from lifts and escalators so you have to walk further.

Your Contributions

Computer Game and Scrabble Improves

Memory:

My very active partner's 82 year memory was very rusty, planning and foresight poor and rejoinders pitiful. Now after 3 years playing over 3000 addictive FreeCell games in which she's quit only about 3 games, plus weekly scrabble for years, all that has changed radically! She's now writing her autobiography, dating from 1923 as a World War I Baby Boomer!

PH, Qld

Memories of Ningaloo

Loved your Newsletter – have spent so many holidays at Ningaloo long before it became a Marine Reserve. We would spend about six weeks in the caravan, living on nor-west snapper – what a way to live. Memories – great! You might find them in the brain you open one day!!!

JD, NSW

The Shepherd and the Yuppie

A shepherd was herding his flock in a remote pasture when suddenly a brand new BMW came out of the dust cloud towards him. The driver, a young man in an Armani suit, Gucci shoes, Ray Ban sunglasses and YSL tie, leaned out the window and asked the shepherd, "If I tell you exactly how many sheep you have in your flock, will you give me one?" The shepherd looked at the man, obviously a yuppie, looked at his peacefully grazing flock, and answered "Sure".

The yuppie parked his car, whipped out his notebook and connected it to a mobile phone. He then surfed to a NASA page on the Internet where he called up a GPS satellite navigation system, scanned the area, then opened up a database on an Excel spreadsheet with complex formulas. He sent an email on his Blackberry and, after a few minutes, received a response. Finally he printed out a 150 page report on his hi-tech miniature printer, turned to the shepherd and said "You have exactly 1586 sheep".

"Correct, take one of the sheep" said the shepherd. He watched the young man select one of the animals and bundle it into his car. Then the shepherd asked, "If I can tell you exactly what your business is, will you give me back my sheep?"

"OK, why not" answered the young man.

"Clearly, you are a consultant", said the shepherd. "That's correct, but how did you guess that?"

"Well", answered the shepherd. "You turned up here, although nobody called you. You want to get paid for an answer I already knew, to a question I never asked, and you know nothing about my business... now give my dog back!"

**Have a Wonderful Christmas from the
"Using our Brains" team!!**