

A-HA NEWS

Innovative agri-food
and nutrition research
for healthy aging

2011

New research chair announced

Nutrition and aging research given priority

Dr. Heather Keller, PhD, RD, FDC, has been appointed the new Schlegel Research Chair in Nutrition and Aging, and Professor in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Waterloo. She is the fourth Schlegel Research Chair, joining Drs George Heckman, Rich Hughson, and Carlos Rojas-Fernandez, Schlegel Research Chairs in Geriatric Medicine, Vascular Aging and Brain Health, and Geriatric Pharmacotherapy, respectively.

Keller's role with the Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging (RIA) involves interaction with the Agri-food for Healthy Aging (A-HA) program, where she will continue her involvement in a number of research and dissemination activities, including interdisciplinary research efforts with fellow A-HA scientists Drs Alison Duncan, Lisa Duizer, and Ken Stark.

Keller has three research streams: nutrition risk

screening, nutrition and aging well in older adults, and nutrition and dementia. Translating this research and knowledge to practitioners, families and older adults is a priority.

Through her research, Keller strives to improve the nutritional state and health of older adults, whether they live in communities or in care facilities. Her research program is comprehensive, ranging from screening and the assessment of nutritional

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Dr. Heather Keller, PhD, RD, FDC, has been appointed the new Schlegel Research Chair in Nutrition and Aging. The position will begin January 1, 2012.

states to the evaluation of innovative interventions, food products and programs.

Currently, Keller is investigating patient and caregiver perceptions of pureed food, the social and physical environments of mealtime and

how they affect food intake, and malnutrition and nutrition care in Canadian hospitals.

The Schlegel-UW RIA welcomes Heather to the Institute, and A-HA looks forward to her continued participation and invaluable expertise.



Improving texture modified foods

A-HA researchers Dr. Lisa Duizer from the Food Science Department at the University of Guelph, and new Schlegel Research Chair in Nutrition and Aging, Dr. Heather Keller, have been exploring ways to improve texture modified foods for older adults with swallowing difficulties. Up to 30% of residents living in Long Term Care (LTC) require texture modified diets, usually due to chronic degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and related dementias, Parkinson's Disease or stroke.

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- Up to 30% of Ontario residents in Long Term Care require texture modified foods due to swallowing difficulties often associated with degenerative diseases (Alzheimer's and related dementias, Parkinson's and stroke). Quality modified texture foods are required to ensure that this vulnerable population has their nutrition needs met.

Improving texture modified foods

From front cover

The research team is evaluating the sensory appeal and nutritional quality of commercially prepared pureed foods and hopes that by understanding the properties that contribute most to consumer liking, they can provide the food industry with insight into how

to manufacture and prepare improved purees. As well, they are identifying the consumer view of these foods including patients/residents/families as well as nursing staff, personal support workers, meal helpers and dietitians.

Over the past year, 12 focus groups with care providers and 15 patient/resident interviews have been conducted; these

are currently being analyzed to identify the consumer perspective and identify how these products can be improved. This past summer, the research team also established the characteristics (i.e., appearance, flavour and taste) of commercially available turkey, carrot and bread purees using a trained sensory panel. The next phase of the project has begun and participants are being recruited, including older adults with swallowing difficulties, to assess consumer liking of selected commercial products.

This project was supported by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs in partnership with the University of Guelph and products were donated by Apetito, Campbell's and HFS. The results of this study will be made available on the A-HA website upon project completion in the spring of 2012.

Developing recipes for texture modified foods prepared in-house

Dr. Duizer is also leading a related A-HA/Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging research project that focuses on purees prepared in-house. Her research team is developing recipes using local products that are tailored to the nutritional and sensory needs of older adults. The recipes will be available to Long Term Care (LTC) communities' nutrition and food service staff and will encourage the use of Ontario agri-foods.

To date, the research team has interviewed staff working

in LTC to identify the challenges and concerns involved in preparing texture modified foods. Results suggest that in-house preparation is often preferred, as it can be more cost-effective and allow facilities to tailor their meals to meet provincial regulations. Based on this information, the research team is creating recipes for pureed Ontario meats and vegetables, including pureed turkey and carrots. The products will undergo sensory and consumer acceptability

testing to identify the preferred products.

In spring 2012, A-HA will share results at an event for health professionals and food service staff working in LTC. The event will include presentations by Dr. Keller, the Ontario Farm Animal Council, and the research team, with a theme to identify linkages between Ontario agriculture, food and health as they relate to texture modified diets for older adults. Stay tuned to the A-HA website for more details as they become available.

Partners for this project include the Turkey Farmers of Ontario and the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association. Funding for this project has been provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP). In Ontario, this program is delivered by the Agricultural Adaptation Council.



Get involved!

In fall 2010, the Seniors Health Research Transfer Network (SHRTN) initiated a new Nutrition Community of Practice (nCoP) to link practitioners involved in the nutrition care of older adults. The nCoP is committed to promoting evidence-based nutrition care by supporting knowledge exchange between members, disseminating best practices, and stimulating research on food and nutrition issues for older adults. A-HA and the Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging are members of the core working group, along with Dietitians of Canada, Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, Personal Support Network of Ontario and Ontario Society of Nutrition Management.

To date, the nCoP has held monthly teleconferences with core working group members and hosted a webinar in spring 2011 titled Making the Most of Mealtimes, which had over 200 registrants. Reading lists on a number of topics related to nutrition and older adults are disseminated to nCoP members monthly. The nCoP is planning to host another joint webinar with SHRTN's Diabetes CoP sometime in 2012.

To become a member and access the nCoP network and resources, please visit the SHRTN website (<http://beta.shrtn.on.ca>) and click on the Membership Information link at the top of the page. You will be asked to select which CoP you would like to become a member of, so remember to check Nutrition.

Functional Foods for Healthy Aging toolkit

The toolkit provides a collection of resources to assist Registered Dietitians in communicating with older adults about functional foods.

A research team led by A-HA scientist Alison Duncan, Ph.D., R.D., in the Department of Human Health and Nutritional Sciences at the University of Guelph, is developing a Functional Foods for Healthy Aging toolkit. It is a collection of resources that will provide guidance and materials to assist Registered Dietitians in communicating with older adults about functional foods.

Registered Dietitians are arguably best suited to communicate the potential health benefits of functional foods with older adults. To facilitate this discussion, the toolkit will provide background information on functional foods, including definitions, information regarding regulations, and guidance for understanding functional food packaging. Case studies of various products are included which highlight information relevant to older consumers. In addition, educational resource sheets on common functional food bioactives (antioxidants, dietary fibre, omega-3 fatty acids, plant sterols, prebiotics and probiotics) are included as Appendices.

The toolkit will also summarize the results of a University of Guelph research study that is


currently underway. Dr. Duncan and co-investigator Dr. Judy Sheeshka from the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition at the University of Guelph are examining the consumption, awareness, understanding and motivating factors related to functional foods in community dwelling older adults. Data collection is expected to be completed in Winter 2012, and the results will be added to the toolkit, providing dietitians with insight into older adults' attitudes toward functional foods.


Dr. Duncan recognizes the importance of relating research to practice, "We are very excited about the value that this toolkit can have for Registered Dietitians. We have focused our efforts in this regard by highlighting key Dietetic Practice Points throughout the toolkit."

Dr. Duncan will present the preliminary toolkit this Fall at the 4th Annual Health Professionals' Forum at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair on November 9, 2011. Health professionals will be invited to provide feedback to help inform the final version of the toolkit, which will be made available on the A-HA website in 2012.

Stay connected with A-HA's social media

To date, A-HA has over 40 blog postings, 700 tweets, 250 Twitter followers and 71 "likes" on the A-HA Facebook page. Here's how you can stay connected:

 Follow us on Twitter (@foodhealthaging)

 Like us on Facebook (Agri-food for Healthy Aging fan page)

 Check out the A-HA blog (aha.the-ria.ca/blog)

 Visit our website (aha.the-ria.ca)

The A-HA program is committed to disseminating research results as there is huge potential to enhance quality of life for older adults through the innovative use of food and nutrition strategies.

Canadian Malnutrition Task Force

Dr. Heather Keller is co-chair of the Canadian Malnutrition Task Force (CMTF), a special interest group of the Canadian Nutrition Society that is investigating the incidence and effects of malnutrition in Canada. CMTF is currently conducting a study in Canadian hospitals to determine the prevalence of malnutrition and its effect on patient outcomes. Patient questionnaires and focus groups with dietitians will also provide insight about hospital nutrition care.

Preliminary results indicate that the prevalence of malnutrition in Canadian hospitals is approximately 40 percent, and malnourished patients are at a greater risk of in-hospital mortality. Nutritional status can also deteriorate during hospital stay. Notably, physicians acknowledge the importance of nutrition care for malnourished patients and feel that having access to a nutrition team would be beneficial. Patients identified



the need for greater support during meal times, as many experienced difficulty reaching meals, opening packages and cutting food.

CMTF notes that strategies need to be developed to enhance collaboration between health professionals and improve nutrition care in Canadian hospitals.

Dr. Keller says, "Awareness is developing that a 'culture change' is needed; on admission patients with nutrition problems need to be identified and nutrition care needs to be started early. Quality food

and assistance where needed to ensure that this food is consumed needs to be a focus of care. Finally, at discharge, the nutritional needs of the patient need to be linked to community resources that can support them. Stakeholders from government, health professional organizations, accrediting bodies and the general community are needed to make this change."

In the future, CMTF hopes to investigate the transition from hospital to home and how to improve nutritional care in Long Term Care homes.

Agri-Food and Rural Link program

The Agri-Food and Rural Link program is the hub for knowledge translation and transfer (KTT) at the University of Guelph and is an important component of the partnership between the university and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. The program aims to accelerate the transfer of research knowledge into use

and facilitate the involvement of research users into the research process.

In fall 2010, A-HA was a successful recipient of a KTT grant from the Agri-Food and Rural Link program. This funding support has made it possible for A-HA to realize many KTT activities, including creating this annual newsletter, developing and

maintaining a blog, participating in the SHRTN Nutrition Community of Practice (see page 3), holding KTT events such as the Health Professionals' Forum at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair and training Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP).

A-HA has a strong mandate for KTT, and with support from the Agri-Food and Rural

Link program, will continue to participate in knowledge exchange activities within Ontario's agri-food and health sectors. If you would like more information about the Agri-Food and Rural Link program, please visit their website at uoguelph.ca/research/omafra/partnership/KTT_and_IP.shtml.



The Agri-food for Healthy Aging (A-HA) initiative is a collaborative research group created through the efforts of the Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging (RIA), University of Guelph, University of Waterloo and MaRS Landing. By exploring linkages between agriculture, food, nutrition and human health, A-HA aims to realize innovative opportunities for Ontario's agri-food and health sectors to improve health and wellbeing of older adults.

This newsletter was made possible by:

