

ACT

FALL - 2019 NEWSLETTER

ACT SYMPOSIUM 2019

On August 12-13th, we held our 7th ACT symposium. Our first symposium had fewer than 50 persons and was held in a conference room at the (former) Group Health Research Institute. This year over 160 people attended the symposium, which was held at the Washington State Convention Center!

Our theme this year was “Celebrating 25 years of collaborative research on aging and dementia”, as the ACT study turns a quarter of a century old! In 1994 we began enrollment of our initial cohort of nearly 2600 persons. Remarkably, 220 from that initial group are still living today. Since then ACT has grown to over 5,670 adult KP Washington members. We are the longest running aging study anywhere that's also set in an integrated healthcare system. This allows us access to both years of research quality data collected from our participants at study visits, and data resources from our healthcare system.

In recognition of the fact that we owe our successes and longevity to participants and their family members, I opened the symposium reading a letter I received from the daughter of a participant who had died. After receiving a letter from me describing the results of her father's brain autopsy, she wrote back to tell me how meaningful his participation over many years in ACT had been for him. That letter was deeply moving for all of us.

Throughout the symposium we heard many interesting presentations - each followed by a standing ovation!! Good for speakers' morale and a chance for listeners to move as opposed to sitting all day long. We focused on future areas of scientific discovery. For example, the activity monitors many subjects have worn will soon be able to tell us more about how physical activity patterns relate to brain aging – from cognition to balance, falls and other things that change with time.

We are also learning about the chemical and biological changes happening behind the scenes in our brains that go along with being resilient or not, and whether there are ways to promote resilience in order to postpone or prevent dementia during life. We have more connections to basic science than we've ever had before, another unique feature of a community-based study like ACT.

I was thrilled that we could focus on future possibilities to expand ACT into even more areas of science, as well as the fact that we attracted many new, talented young scientists from Seattle and around the country. These scientists are interested in using ACT to study things like eye health, medications, hospitalizations, and air pollution, as they relate to cognitive decline and dementia.

It's clear that ACT would not be the Living Learning Laboratory of Aging it is today without a huge level of commitment from a multitude of people. This theme was evident throughout the symposium, with many presentations demonstrating how we are gaining a better understanding of the aging process and the brain.

Thanks again to our committed participants, families, staff and faculty - after 25 years our future is even brighter than our great beginning. HOW ABOUT A STANDING OVATION FOR THAT?!?

With gratitude,

Eric B. Larson, MD, MPH

JUST FOR FUN:

Question: Why did the scarecrow get an award?

Answer: Because he stood out in his field.

Send comments or suggestions to:

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