

Meeting report

Second IRCHAL conference and the communication of biogerontology to health care personnel

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The International Research Centre for Healthy Ageing and Longevity (IRCHAL) was launched in 2004, with its inaugural conference held in Sydney, Australia. A brief report of the 1st conference and launch of IRCHAL was published in *Biogerontology* (vol. 5, pp. 137–138, 2004). The 2nd *International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity*, developed by IRCHAL and co-sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO), was held in Brisbane, Australia (March 18–20, 2005). The conference was a successful continuation in maintaining and fulfilling the main aim of the IRCHAL, which is “*to promote healthy ageing and longevity through interdisciplinary collaboration amongst the worlds leading experts on health and ageing, and the dissemination of evidence-based knowledge throughout the nations of the developed and developing world*”.

Once again, the IRCHAL brought together some of the best minds in biogerontology, biodemography, biomedicine, natural and complementary medicine, and psycho-social-gerontology, including spirituality. The conference was a major international event with representatives from the WHO, United Nations Focal Point on Ageing, the US National Institute on Aging (NIA), Australian Government and leading universities, research institutes and associations from around the world.

Moreover, almost all these experts appeared to be sincerely and altruistically committed in fulfilling the aim of communicating and disseminating evidence-based knowledge. That was obvious from the range and variety of topics discussed in the plenary and parallel sessions, during the very busy schedule of the 3 day conference. Three plenary sessions covered the subject areas such as the basic research on ageing and its clinical

relevance, longevity insights gained from centenarians, a live interview and interaction with a group of local centenarians and their family members, and lectures on policy matters, holistic approaches, and future trends in life-style related changes in life expectancies.

In 16 other sessions, often 3 or 4 sessions running in parallel, biological, medicinal, social, psychological and spiritual aspects of healthy ageing were presented. These ranged from the discussion of the most up-to-date molecular genetics of mitochondria, and mechanistic basis of ageing-modulatory molecules to general overviews of complementary medicine including nutritional and herbal treatments, and holistic approaches from spirituality to thermodynamics of love and tantalizing details of old-age sexuality.

For a high quality conference with such long list of outstanding speakers from across the globe, it was disappointing to see only a few hundred delegates in attendance to benefit from the wealth of knowledge on offer. This raises the issue of the target audience. IRCHALs aim is to design ethical conference programmes with no influence from any commercial sponsors in order to inform, educate and train health care personnel, including general physicians, clinicians, nurses, nutritionists, and other therapists, regarding the science and non-sense of ageing interventions and therapies. However, my own experience and impression is that a significant proportion of such personnel have been so much corrupted by the traditions and practices set by the drug industry, by bribing and pampering them with goods and rewards, that serious scientific communication, which demands some effort and commitment on their part, is not very attractive

for such people. Furthermore, since the present scientific knowledge is often unable to provide definitive formulae and recipes to cater to the needs of an individual, many of these health care personnel feel that science-based conferences have little or no usable value for their day to day practice. IRCHAL and its advisors need to deal with this practical problem, and find ways to draw more audience interested in learning and practicing science-based knowledge. Additionally, IRCHAL needs to find ways to involve young scientists involved in original and basic research to present their novel results and breakthroughs in these conferences.

For the future, IRCHAL has identified at least nine domains of research, practice and communication, which will be supported and promoted in the following conferences and other activities. These domains are:

1. Demography: present status and future trends, population age-structures, projections, and world-wide disparities.
2. Social implications: economic policies and strategies towards healthcare and welfare.
3. Ethics and psychology: issues on the sanctity and spirituality of life and death.
4. Clinical and pharmacological aspects: ageing diseases, treatments, development and evaluation of medicines.
5. Complementary medicine: nutritional supplements, herbal medicine including Western, Ayurvedic and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), exercise, yoga, meditation and other complementary therapies.
6. Longevity, genetics and lifestyle: centenarians, gene association, and life style variants.
7. Practical interventions: evidence-based interventions and therapies, including food restriction, functional foods, nutraceuticals and cosmeceuticals.
8. Frontiers of knowledge: molecular mechanisms, new technologies and strategies.
9. Comparative gerontology and evolution: evolutionary life histories and mechanisms.

I am very confident that IRCHAL will not only maintain its commitment and standards, but also will make further improvements in the choice and range of topics to be discussed, debated and dissected for their worth and accuracy. Furthermore, the international advisory council of the IRCHAL hopefully will keep bringing in the best of the best minds while resisting the pressures of lobbying, personal interests and friendships. Most importantly, one hopes to learn from the example set by the Weller family, who despite being the main sponsor of the IRCHAL, is least visible and interfering in its scientific running. IRCHAL is not a platform for self-promotion and self-glorification. IRCHAL is an organization for the support, promotion and communication of science-based knowledge towards achieving healthy ageing and longevity.

The next conference of the IRCHAL, "*The 3rd International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity*", is scheduled to be held from April 28 to 30, 2006, in Melbourne, Australia (website: <http://www.longevity-international.com>), where we can look forward to receiving the latest and accurate scientific and holistic information on ageing and longevity from the researchers and practitioners in the forefront of these areas.