

BRAIN RESEARCH
DISCOVERIES™

USF HEALTH BYRD ALZHEIMER'S INSTITUTE

FALL / WINTER 2013

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Major developments.

The last six months have been eventful ones for the Byrd Alzheimer's Institute. A major achievement was the re-establishment of support from the state of Florida for research programs at the Institute. These one-time funds are designated for clinical research activities in support of our new application for National Institutes of Health (NIH) recognition as an Alzheimer's Disease Research Center. The Byrd Institute submitted its proposal for the first round of applications in June 2013. Importantly, we hope this is the start of major developments to fight Alzheimer's within the Sunshine State. The Purple Ribbon Task Force released a series of important recommendations in August, including further support of Alzheimer's research. In September, I was appointed by Governor Scott to the Alzheimer's Disease Advisory Committee, charged with guiding the implementation of these recommendations. I look forward to working with legislators and state officials in developing smart programs to effectively treat this disease.

The Institute continues to grow. In May 2013, we had the grand opening of the Genomics Center on the 5th floor of the Byrd Institute. This is a university-wide initiative to develop the use of genomics for personalized medicine. Although the Genomics Center's mission is broader than Alzheimer's, Byrd faculty members are already beginning collaborations with the genomic experts in this state-of-the-art facility. We also have added a service line in Occupational Therapy in the Functional Assessments Facility. We look forward to sharing more about this service with you in future issues of *Discoveries*.

This issue is one of my favorites, if only because it features my wife, Marcia Gordon. Marcia and I have worked and lived together for nearly a third of a century. She is a stellar scientist with continuous research funding for the last 25 years and a wonderful research partner. However, it is as a life partner that she excels. While I have contributed to our research success, the credit for the many successes of our two children all belongs to her. She is the love of my life.

Our PET center continues to increase its patient flow, and the major reason is Jennifer Bogush. As you will learn, she is a superb Nuclear Medicine Technologist; but more than that, she is someone who makes her clients feel at home and secure while they obtain a PET scan. It is the strength of her personality that brings them back for further studies.

This issue also describes our internally generated study on the effects of coconut oil supplementation. This was brought to our attention by Dr. Mary Newport and her many on-line proponents. It was made possible by a generous donation from the Albert Foundation. Hopefully, two years from now when our patients ask about coconut oil, we can give them scientifically validated information.

On the development front, the Alzheimer's and the Arts fundraising event will be held on November 23rd. This promises to be a highly entertaining event with multiple artists performing and exhibiting their work, including... the CEO. Please join us for this gala evening. And also consider joining our new *Circle of Friends Society*. The Institute has been blessed to have a bevy of steadfast supporters of the activities we engage in, and this new *Circle* is designed to recognize these very special people.

Dave Morgan, PhD
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



CARMEN SCETTINO

BRAIN RESEARCH DISCOVERIES

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'One step closer and another step closer'

The excitement of discovery draws research scientist Marcia Gordon, PhD, into her lab day after day in search of a better understanding of Alzheimer's disease and how to combat it.

Dr. Marcia Gordon knew since grade school that she was drawn to a career in science. By the time she was in college, she was particularly interested in the brain, even though there weren't many role models of female scientists in the 1970s.

Today, she is one of the principal investigators into brain function and malfunction at the University of South Florida's Byrd Alzheimer's Institute in Tampa, where she also helps train the next generation of neuroscientists, including young women who hope to follow in her footsteps.

"Almost exclusively, I'm working on new therapies to help prevent the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease," said Gordon. "I consider myself a research scientist first and foremost."

It's a competitive field where scientists sink or swim based on whether they can get their research proposals funded. Gordon has been succeeding at it at USF for the past 21 years, making her one of the most senior scientists on staff.

Although she wishes the memory-robbing disease could be eradicated, she says it's more likely that science will develop better ways to manage it.

"There is no disease that medical science has completely cured," she said. "But what we can do is get one step closer and another step closer until we reach a point with Alzheimer's similar to where we are

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"Almost exclusively, I'm working on new therapies to help prevent the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. I consider myself a research scientist first and foremost." Marcia Gordon, PhD



One step closer

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

with heart disease – we can't stop people from getting heart disease, but we can manage their condition so that they can have a full and happy life."

Among the discoveries in recent years fueling her hopes are the high-tech brain scans that reveal what scientists believe are some of the precursors of dementia, years before the first signs of memory loss. The scans show the buildup of a harmful substance known as amyloid plaque that is believed to impair the function of nearby brain cells.

"There's about 17 years between the time that the amyloid plaque starts to be visible on these scans and when the person has enough mental deterioration that they can no longer live independently," Gordon said. "So, an optimistic part of this disease is that once we start getting these scans showing amyloid plaque, we may have 15 years or so that we can do something about it.

"Our hope is that we can treat people with a therapeutic [drug] before they reach the point where they show up at the doctor's office because they can no longer balance their checkbook. And we're optimistic right now, as there are a number of things that are progressing to clinical trials."

A 'major' dilemma in college

When Gordon enrolled as an undergraduate at the University of Southern California, she remembers the dilemma she faced declaring her major.

"They had two majors that had to do with the brain. One was psychology and the other was biology. I said I wanted to major in both of them, but they said you can't really do that because one's a B.A. [bachelor of arts degree program] and one's a B.S. [bachelor of science degree]. So I said, 'You have to figure something out,'" she recalled.

"They decided they would create a new major, called psychobiology, and I was accepted into the first class with that major." Her fascination with the inner workings of the brain led to her doctorate in molecular biology, also from USC.

Now a full professor in the Department of Molecular Pharmacology and Physiology in USF Health's Morsani College of Medicine, she cautions not to let her official title fool you.

"Mostly what I do as a professor is train students in how to perform laboratory research in the lab. It's largely one-on-one training, like working with a journeyman apprentice, and not really what you think of as far as a college professor who lectures to classes."

She proudly notes that one of her protégés was recently accepted into a graduate program at Oxford University in England.

Her mentoring role extends to her research colleagues as well.

"She's definitely been extremely helpful in helping me progress as a scientist," said assistant professor Dr. Kevin Nash,

who joined the staff six years ago. "She's definitely someone people turn to."

The thrill of learning something new lures Gordon back to the lab day after day.

"If you look back at your high school days and the lab experiments you did, you kind of knew what the outcome was supposed to be. But in a real laboratory, that does not happen," she said.

"I don't know what's going to happen in my experiments. That's the most exciting part of what I do – the discovery of new knowledge and new findings. We're in the business of generating new knowledge."

Of mice and mentoring

Much of her investigational research involves the use of mice that have been genetically altered to exhibit dementia. USF maintains hundreds of laboratory mice for studying Alzheimer's disease, and Gordon plays a key role.

"She does a lot of mice breeding and maintains these mice so that more of us can do experiments," Nash said.

"She knows exactly which mouse comes from which parents and what its genetic makeup is. From each offspring, she'll take a skin sample to see which ones have the genetic makeup that we need, and then we can use those in lab studies. Without Marcia, it would be difficult for a number of us to do our research," he added.

Nash also praises her skill at writing successful grant proposals and helping her colleagues do the same.

Gordon and her husband, Byrd Institute CEO Dr. Dave Morgan, help researchers hone their grant requests, because they know that fewer than 10 percent of the requests to the National Institutes of Health from throughout the country will receive funding.

"People like Marcia and Dr. Morgan help you critically analyze how you've written it and how you can improve it so that it becomes more competitive," Nash said.

To escape from the rigors of scientific research, Gordon enjoys curling up with a good science fiction novel – but nothing too dark.

"I like science fiction novels where the future is a brighter and happier place. No post-apocalyptic stuff for me!" she declared with a laugh.

She's also a full-time mom to a 16-year-old son who attends Tampa Bay Technical High School, and she recently helped her 22-year-old daughter relocate to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, where she's in graduate school studying ways to design communities to promote healthier lifestyles.

The family's two dogs, a Lab mix and a beagle, also rely on her for their regular walks.

But it's her passion for understanding how the brain changes during aging and the promise of testing new

drugs and other therapies to protect brain cells from dying through Alzheimer's disease that fuel her pioneering spirit.

Once again, she draws an analogy to how medical science has improved the lives of people with heart disease.

"Fifty years ago, men had a heart attack at age 50 and died. Nowadays, people in their 40s and 50s go to a doctor and have their cholesterol screened, and those with heart disease may start taking various preventive medications. Now we have men who are 70 years old who may have a heart attack, but they survive it," she said.

"So we really haven't cured heart disease at all, and probably the same is going to be true for Alzheimer's disease. We're not going to cure it right away, but it may well be the case that you'll go in at the age of 50 or 60 and have your brain scanned for amyloid buildup, and individuals who have too much will be given some sort of medicine to correct the problem." ■

PHOTO BY ALEX STAFFORD

Marcia Gordon, PhD



Coconut oil: A boost for faltering brain cells?

A pilot study at USF will test a Florida doctor's remarkable claims that her home remedy helped her husband regain some of his memory and personality lost to Alzheimer's.

Could a Tampa Bay-area doctor's hunch be the next big breakthrough in Alzheimer's disease?

That's what researchers at the University of South Florida in Tampa are about to find out.

They've just begun the first scientific study of Alzheimer's patients consuming an ordinary cooking oil mixed with a nutritional supplement in higher doses than currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

The catalyst behind the study is Dr. Mary Newport, a neonatologist who runs the newborn intensive care unit at Spring Hill Regional Hospital north of Tampa. In the past few years, Newport has become a one-woman tour de force trying to convince anyone who will listen that a supplement given to premature babies to help them thrive may also offer hope for people at the other end of the age spectrum who are experiencing memory loss.

Her proof? Her 63-year-old husband, Steve, an accountant who was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's disease at the unusually early age of 54.

Newport believes coconut oil – which can be found on supermarket shelves or in health-food stores – combined with another oil can act as a sort of brain food that helps people regain some of their cognitive function lost to dementia.

She says she saw noticeable improvements soon after her husband began taking her home-made concoction five years ago that she believes provides a better source of energy, known as ketones, to dying brain cells. Since then, she has eagerly trumpeted her personal experiences in television interviews (including with televangelist Pat Robertson on "The 700 Club"), in numerous newspaper articles, through her Web site (www.coconutketones.com) and Facebook page, and her book, "Alzheimer's Disease: What If There Was A

Cure?", which she says has sold more than 50,000 copies since it was released in 2011.

All that media attention has put increasing pressure on the scientific community to validate or debunk her claims.

The USF Health Byrd Alzheimer's Institute believes it is the first research facility to put Newport's claims to the test.

"I think it's a question that's been begging to be answered," said Dr. Amanda Smith, medical director of the Byrd Institute. "There's been so much attention in the media about this topic. When people come to us with articles cut out of the paper, we don't have the scientific data to answer their questions."

The two-year study, approved by the FDA, began this summer and will involve at least 60 participants with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease.

The brain and old car engines

Jill Smith, MA, who will coordinate the study, says the effects of coconut oil on brain function may be similar, in layman's terms, to getting an old car engine to run better – temporarily.

"You could find that by putting a higher grade of oil and fuel in it, it continues to work well and lasts longer, but it's still an old engine and it will still eventually die out," said Jill Smith, the Institute's assistant director of clinical research.

"This is similar to coconut oil for Alzheimer's disease. You might find that your 'engine' (brain) works better for a while. And we don't know how long this effect will last. That's something we're studying, too."

Researchers remain skeptical, however, that the coconut oil will address what they believe is an underlying cause of dementia: a buildup of abnormal proteins, known as amyloid plaques, in the brain suspected of playing a

Coconut oil

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

major role in memory loss. Other studies at the Byrd Institute and throughout the world hope to find ways to prevent or reverse the widespread deterioration of brain cells that makes Alzheimer's disease the 6th leading cause of death in the United States.

"What we hope this study will show is that those brain cells that do remain will function better," Dr. Smith said. "So, while we can't cure their disease, we can perhaps help improve patients' symptoms and quality of life."

Newport says she's "extremely excited" that the improvements she has seen – and those reported to her by more than 200 others who have followed her advice – will be put to the test.

"When I get emails from people and they tell me how much their loved one has improved, it just makes my day," she said. "It blows me away!"

The philanthropic Leo and Anne Albert Charitable Trust, based in Palm Beach, Fla., is underwriting the study with a

\$250,000 grant. The study product, Fuel for Thought®, is being supplied by Cognate Nutritionals.

A search for answers

What led Newport to experimenting with coconut oil?

As her husband's memory began to falter in 2001 and worsened over the next several years, she found little improvement from conventional drugs and searched the Internet for anything else that might help. She came across an Alzheimer's study underway in 2008 that was testing a medicinal drink as a better fuel to help brain cells function when they could no longer use glucose as their primary energy source.

Further investigation led Newport to a key ingredient in the medicinal drink – a fat known as medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs), derived from coconut oil.

"The reason that (MCTs) rang a bell with me is because, as a neonatologist, we started adding this to the feedings of

newborns back in the late '70s and early '80s" to help them grow, she said, noting that MCTs are now included in many infant formulas today.

The experimental medicinal drink she read about was approved the following year for use once a day with a doctor's prescription and is sold under the name Axona®. By then, Newport had not only been giving her husband something similar with encouraging results, she also began adding second, third and fourth dosages daily, because she knew that each supplement provided only a short-term fuel source to brain cells.

While Axona may cost between \$50 and \$100 a month for use once a day, Newport estimates she spends about the same amount each month for four servings a day of her homemade blend of coconut oil and MCT oil.

Turning back the hands of time?

Newport, now 61, initially added two tablespoons of coconut oil to her husband's morning oatmeal. She later began buying MCT oil and mixing it with equal portions of coconut oil. Because both products can cause abdominal distress, bloating and diarrhea, she gradually worked up to giving Steve four doses a day by adding it to smoothies and salad dressings, and

Hence her book (now updated and in its second edition), her Web site and countless interviews to tout Steve's progress and to offer hope and detailed advice to others who may want to give it a try.

Even today, 12 years after he began showing signs of the disease, her husband of 41 years still knows who she is and enjoys watching TV and listening to music, despite periodic setbacks, she said.

"Physically, he's in better shape now than he was five years ago," before he started taking coconut oil, she added.

The Byrd study will involve two groups, each with 30 participants between the ages of 55 and 90. One group will consume a 1-ounce drink with MCT oil and a concentrated, extra virgin coconut oil at home with breakfast (and soon thereafter with other meals if they tolerate it well), while the other group will be given a placebo that looks and tastes the same, said Jill Smith. After three months, both groups will switch.

During the six-month experiment, each participant will return to the Byrd Institute about once a month for memory testing and to have their overall health monitored, since the supplement will add extra calories and fats to their diet.

Byrd researchers hope to report on the effectiveness of the coconut oil/MCT oil mixture and how long any benefits lasted in 2015, to allow sufficient time to recruit volunteers and analyze the data.

Coconut oil's widespread use

Newport points out that coconut oil was once found in many U.S. households before World War II for use as a cooking oil, along with cottonseed oil and lard, before they were largely replaced by

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Jill Smith, MA, Byrd Institute assistant director of clinical research, discusses the Coconut Oil Study with the Institute's medical director, Dr. Amanda Smith.

"What we hope this study will show is that those brain cells that do remain will function better."

Dr. Amanda Smith, medical director, USF Health Byrd Alzheimer's Institute

using it in place of butter on hot vegetables ("It tastes really great on a sweet potato!") and for a variety of other uses. Within months, she was stunned by the results.

"I felt like he went back in time a couple of years with his symptoms," she said. "His personality came back. Animation in his face came back. He could participate in conversations again. He physically could not pick his feet up and run, and he was able to start running again. There were just all kinds of things that we saw improve."

Interested? To learn more about this Byrd Institute study or to enroll,

Visit the Byrd Web site (alz.health.usf.edu), call Dr. Amanda Smith's study team at (813) 974-4355 or email jsmith10@health.usf.edu.

This study is approved by the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board, IRB # Pro00011223.



Q & A with Jennifer Bogush, AS, CNMT, certified nuclear medicine technologist

The Center for Memory C.A.R.E. is equipped with the latest technology to study changes in the brain and other living tissues at the USF Health Byrd Alzheimer's Institute. A cornerstone of the \$3.5 million C.A.R.E. (Clinical Assessment, Research and Education) Center, which has been recognized by the National Institutes of Health as a designated site for producing specialized images of Alzheimer's-related brain deterioration, is a \$1.3 million imager known as a PET scanner.

Tampa native Jennifer Bogush, AS, CNMT, joined the Institute in 2011 when the C.A.R.E. Center opened, and she is responsible for producing the images vital to medical diagnoses and scientific research. A nuclear medicine technologist for 23 years who has specialized in PET and CT scans for the past 8 years, we asked her about her high-tech profession.



PHOTO BY ALEX STAFFORD

Q: What exactly is a PET/CT technologist?

A: PET stands for "positron emission tomography." A PET/CT (computerized tomography) technologist is board-certified in nuclear medicine with specialized training in PET/CT technology. PET/CT imaging specializes in the assessment of epilepsy, Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, and cancer, as well as medical research, by using PET and CT scan 'fused' imaging.

Q: What is a PET/CT scan?

A: A PET/CT scan is an advanced diagnostic tool that aids in combining the CT's anatomical detail along with the PET scan's ability to detect abnormalities earlier than other imaging techniques. PET scans enhance patient treatment through early detection, assessment of the severity of a disease, and monitoring of disease progression.

Q: How does a PET scan differ from an MRI?

A: A PET scan evaluates how well the body's organs and tissues are functioning, while an MRI evaluates the size and shape of the body's structures. The biggest advantage and difference, compared with an MRI, is that the PET/CT can reveal the cellular metabolic changes occurring in the body much earlier than any other imaging technology.

Q: As the technologist, do you administer the PET scan and interpret the results?

A: I administer the PET/CT scan as the technologist, but our board-certified nuclear radiologist interprets the PET/CT scans. The results are routinely sent to the referring physician within 24 to 48 hours.

Q: Is a PET/CT scan covered by insurance?

A: PET/CT scans are covered for reimbursement by Medicare and most other insurance plans. Some insurance carriers require pre-authorization for PET services, along with specific diagnosis codes. At the Byrd Institute, we provide this service to all ordering physicians and obtain any authorizations as needed. Individuals seeking a PET/CT scan must first be evaluated by a licensed physician then obtain a referral for imaging. Patients can also receive the benefit of a PET/CT scan and ongoing memory evaluations by being part of a clinical research study in Alzheimer's disease and mild cognitive impairment. ■



PHOTO BY ALEX STAFFORD

Drawing upon their life experiences

Art therapy helps dementia patients and others develop new pathways of self-expression and contentment.

Creating art promotes self-expression and a sense of accomplishment. For people with memory loss and other limitations, those two intangible rewards can be especially meaningful.

Poppy Spencer, an art therapist based in Sarasota, Fla., uses clay, watercolors, origami paper and anything else in what she jokingly refers to as her “Mary Poppins bag of tricks” to promote the therapeutic benefits of creating a simple drawing or other form of art.

Whether working one-on-one or with a group in the growing niche of art therapy, Spencer relishes the sense of purpose it brings to her clients, including “Betty” (name withheld), a woman in her 90s with moderate Alzheimer’s disease. Spencer said Betty was initially “resistant to being coerced into anything” but later filled three sketchpads with geometric shapes she created and then embellished with colored pencils.

“After Betty would complete her drawing, she would sit back and have this radiant smile and joy exuding from her,” said the art coach and art therapist. “It would bring her peace and joy, and I feel I facilitated her ability to access that.”

Spencer differentiates what she does from standard art classes in several ways.

How art therapy differs

For starters, when working with a memory-impaired person who may not understand who she is or what her role is, Spencer’s first objective is to try to tap into her client’s interests, including any previous artistic background.

She then tries to capitalize on that by providing them with the right art materials – dripless watercolor pens, smaller canvases, and colored pencils (instead of messy paint brushes) – to help them succeed, rather than giving them inappropriate materials that would create or add to their frustration and resentment.

And unlike art teachers who may critique a student’s work, Spencer’s clients work in a judgment-free zone.

“There were times when they’d say ‘I think I’m finished now,’ and I’d say, ‘OK, you’re finished.’ There was no cajoling, no judgment, no ‘You need to finish this part...’ or ‘You need

to do this,’” Spencer said.

“We cannot become attached to the results. Clients have to be the ones who are completely in control and empowered by their own creative art process.”

“Control” and “empowered” aren’t words usually associated with Alzheimer’s patients, but Spencer says these represent some of the therapeutic benefits of her role.

“I tell my clients, ‘You determine what we’re going to do. You determine what’s comfortable. You determine how I fit in here.’ Because if we push and push and push, a person with memory loss will often push back and resist,” she explained. “Rather than strong-arm them and try to overpower them, you give in and let go and say to yourself, ‘OK, how can I work with this?’”

She recalls that Betty was anxiously folding and refolding her napkin during lunch when they first met.

“So I pulled out some origami paper and said, ‘Can you teach me how to fold this piece of paper?’ Instead of forcing

Arden Courts resident Marilyn Emerson (right) and her daughter, Jill Emerson-Pratt, look through some of Marilyn’s paintings. These and more have been donated to the Byrd Alzheimer’s Institute’s “Alzheimer’s & the Arts” fundraiser.

her to put her napkin away, which she didn’t want to do, we just transferred the folding material to do something that accommodated everybody.”

And when another elderly client, “Alice,” who also had moderate Alzheimer’s disease, lost interest in creating watercolor drawings of scenes from cherished photo albums of her worldwide travels, Spencer took a different approach.

Spencer recalled that Alice once enjoyed needlepoint and crochet. “So one day I brought yarn and knitting needles and said, ‘Can you teach me how to knit?’ I knew how to knit, but I wanted to empower my client to feel good about teaching me, because she was very assertive when we first met.”

Psychology plays a role

If it sounds like art therapy involves more than a little psychology, Spencer wouldn’t disagree. She draws upon not only her academic training (a dual master’s in psychology and art from Mount Mary College in Milwaukee, Wis., after receiving a bachelor’s in fine arts from Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla.), but also her experience working with people of all ages and abilities for the past 11 years.

The self-described lifelong student of psychology now also finds herself teaching courses in psychology to art students at the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota as an adjunct faculty member.

Spencer knows that each art therapy client brings a different set of circumstances, abilities and behaviors when expressing themselves through art, and she tailors her coaching accordingly, like when she worked with “Charles,” a retired dentist with advanced dementia who once enjoyed sculpting.

Thinking that intricate sculpting tools are somewhat similar to a dentist’s tools, she encouraged Charles to express himself by once again working with clay. “He sculpted the most exquisite and intricate human faces in a ball of clay the size of a golf ball, but then after about 10 minutes, he’d take his thumb and smudge the whole thing and start all over again,” she recalled. “That repetition gave him a sense of balance and control.”

Her role, she says, is to help memory-impaired persons feel successful, especially when they may feel that they’re otherwise losing control in their lives.

“I want to make sure that their external environment, the art materials they work with, is easily within their control, so that it evokes a feeling of confidence within their internal environment that may be out of control.”

And when it all comes together, there’s nothing better, Spencer said.

“I think it gives them a huge sense of confidence, purposefulness, social engagement and a feeling of being comfortable and safe in a controlled environment.” ■

For more information

Poppy Spencer can be reached at poppy@coachpoppy.com.



New 'Circle of Friends Society' to support Byrd Institute's mission

The Byrd Institute is making an impact on our community and beyond.

One day soon, older adults will no longer grasp to retain their identity. Families will no longer be torn apart by living with and caring for a person who has become a stranger in a familiar body. Children will no longer struggle to understand why grandma or grandpa doesn't recognize them, and the USF Health Byrd Alzheimer's Institute is leading the fight to make that happen.

The Byrd Institute is on track to begin preventing new cases of Alzheimer's by the year 2020. As the University of South Florida's only vertically integrated transitional research center, the Byrd Institute provides a multi-pronged approach to solving the challenges of Alzheimer's through basic science research, clinical research, patient care and diagnosis, caregiver resources and community education, all in one location.

Byrd Institute scientists are engaged in research projects examining the causes of

and potential cures for memory loss, currently supported by 39 research grants. Hundreds of patients are taking part in 15 clinical trials to test promising drugs and other therapies that could halt or reverse the disease.

The Institute is proud to have been recognized by the National Institutes of Health as a designated site for the federal Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging program. Other recent accomplishments include the creation of an "Award of Excellence" program to help consumers know

which assisted living facilities and home health agencies in their community have voluntarily met higher standards of care.

"Unrestricted annual donor support is vital to the Institute. When donors provide support on an annual basis, it provides the Institute with a steady source of funds for important research, clinical, education and outreach activities, which allows the Institute to continue to make a huge impact on our community," said Holly Lisle, director of development at the Institute.

"Sometimes donors think that if they can't name a research lab or create an endowment, their gift may not have a meaningful impact. Support at all levels is important to the success of the Institute, and we have created the Byrd Institute *Circle of Friends Society* to recognize our donors for their leadership gifts," Lisle said.

With a donation of \$1,000 or more, individuals, corporations and foundations will be recognized annually by the Institute for their commitment to help fund its most pressing unmet needs.

Circle of Friends Society member benefits include:

- Special recognition in Byrd Institute publications and online communications
- Invitations to lectures and special events
- *Brain Research Discoveries* magazine
- Advance opportunity to sign up for National Memory Screening Day and other Byrd Institute events

Membership in the *Circle of Friends Society* also entitles Byrd Institute donors to membership in the University of South Florida's President's Club.

"There will only be one inaugural group for our *Circle of Friends Society*, and we invite everyone to make their mark against Alzheimer's," Lisle said.

Gifts may be made by check or credit card. Checks are made out to USF Foundation Inc.; an envelope for the donation has been provided in this magazine. Credit card gifts may be made through the Institute's Web site. All gifts should include Fund #250148.

...until Alzheimer's is a memory™ ■

For more information about the *Circle of Friends Society*,

Visit the Byrd Institute's Web site at alz.health.usf.edu, or contact Holly Lisle at (813) 974-0890 or hlisle@health.usf.edu.



'Alzheimer's & the Arts'

Performance and Visual Arts Fundraiser Nov. 23

The Byrd Alzheimer's Institute is bringing the arts and Alzheimer's together for a very special fundraiser to benefit our research, patient care and educational efforts.

"We're calling it 'Alzheimer's & The Arts' because we want to celebrate the arts and how they can enhance the lives of people living with Alzheimer's disease, and vice versa," said Holly Lisle, director of development for the Institute.

The evening will include entertainment and an online auction. Performers will include accomplished jazz pianist and singer Lillette Jenkins-Wisner of Orlando. The 89-year-old former Sarasota resident, who was diagnosed with memory loss at the Byrd Institute, will perform with her daughter and granddaughter.

Other performers include the Shoes At the Door Dance Company comprised mostly of graduates from the University of South Florida's College of the Arts, vocalist and Byrd Institute CEO Dr. Dave Morgan, and the La Lucha jazz band featuring Alzheimer's researcher John O'Leary on the piano.

An important part of the fundraiser will be an online auction beginning on November 9 and concluding at the event. In addition to a variety of great items, the auction will feature artwork created by individuals living with Alzheimer's. The artwork has been donated by the artists' families and Arden Courts.

Auction items will be on display at the event, and guests will be able to bid from any location while at the event using their smartphones or designated on-site computers. Guests will also have the opportunity to "Make their Mark Against Alzheimer's" with a fun interactive activity.

The inaugural event will take place at the Institute from 6 to 9 p.m. and include hors d'oeuvres and beer and wine. Registration is \$100 per person. To make your reservation, please visit: <http://health.usf.edu/byrd/alzandartsevent.htm>

For more information, contact Holly Lisle at (813) 974-0890 or hlisle@health.usf.edu.

Coconut oil

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vegetable oils and hydrogenated oils like Crisco®. Coconut oil is still commonly used in the Philippines, Southeast Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, she said.

She can't help but wonder if the regular use of coconut oil in the Philippines may explain why its population has a much lower rate of Alzheimer's disease.

She believes coconut oil may be most helpful in the earliest stages of cognitive impairment. Although she agrees with Jill Smith's analogy that coconut oil could help faltering brain cells function better, like an old car engine with better oil and fuel, Newport also wonders if her 50-50 blend of coconut oil and MCT oil could delay or even ward off the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

Newport would also like to see research on whether people with Parkinson's disease and other neurodegenerative disorders could benefit from it, based on the favorable testimonials she said she's received from more than 20 people with Parkinson's.

More clinical trials on coconut oil and MCT oil can be expected if this initial study shows promise, according to Jill Smith.

The clinical trial underway is a bit of an anomaly compared with most others at research facilities like the Byrd Institute. This one involves two ordinary products anyone can buy on their own, rather than an experimental drug developed in a lab.

As Dr. Smith put it, "I like that we're doing something so simple." ■

Making A Difference In Our Communities

The Byrd Institute participates in community outreach activities to connect with audiences and caregivers who may be affected by Alzheimer's disease and related memory disorders. Through these events, the Byrd Institute is able to share information on the warning signs of Alzheimer's disease as well as on support services offered at the Institute.

According to the National Alliance for Caregiving, more than 65 million people, 29 percent of the U.S. population, provide care for a chronically ill, disabled or aged family member or friend. Education and outreach targeted to family caregivers and/or health professionals is an integral part of the Byrd Institute mission. The staff participates in health fairs, expos, conferences and seminars throughout the greater Tampa Bay area, and delivers off-site presentations (upon request) at local churches, civic organizations and private groups.

Information on upcoming community outreach activities is available online on the Byrd Institute Web site at alz.health.usf.edu.

Right: Dr. Richard Hodes (center-left), director of National Institute on Aging at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), paid a special visit to the Byrd Institute with U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor (center-right), to gain insight into the Institute's innovative Alzheimer's research programs.



Above: Dave Morgan, PhD, Byrd Institute CEO and executive director, speaks to members of the Bay Area Medical Association, comprised of 150 African-American physicians within the Tampa Bay area. Physicians learned best practices for diagnosing and treating patients with early onset dementia and Alzheimer's.



Each year, the Byrd Institute proudly supports the Florida Council on Aging's annual Conference on Aging where leaders in the field of aging services and elder care learned about Alzheimer's research, programs and education.