Stimulating scientists and policy makers to take an interest in the wellbeing of older people

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Welcome
“……but it’s what happens outside of the hospital, clinic and surgery which is so important to quality of later life - the home, the street, public buildings, transport..., consumer products. Why can’t engineers and architects take a greater interest in older people?”

Conversation with an eminent gerontologist in 1996
EPSRC EQUAL Initiative

- Extending Quality of Life - Commenced 1996
- Extensive consultation with experts
  - Older People
  - Charities, Social Services Specialists etc
  - Leading Researchers
- Multidisciplinary
  - For example engineers with social/health scientists
- Collaborative
  - With key agencies providing services
- User Involvement
  - Older people are expert users not passive information providers
Making a difference

• Assisting the professionals and practitioners - design, health, social services
  • Best practice guides, tools, education......

• Supporting those who commission buildings, transport systems and products
  • Design guides, design tools, direct consultancy, evaluations...

• Aiding policy development – housing, transport, care....
  • Housing Corporation, Department for Transport....

• Improving regulations, standards and expectations
  • British Standards, Building Regulations, requirements of various Government Departments....
Touchstones for success

• **Bottom-up not top-down**
  – ageing is a new area for research
  – the innovators are those at the leading edge of science
  – policy driven approaches fail to spot the opportunities for matching science and the needs of an ageing society

• **Ageing research thrives**
  – when those with knowledge of leading edge of science become engaged with ageing issues
  – when older people, practitioners from all walks of life and researchers get together
  – on grassroots “bottom up” enthusiasm of researchers and their supporters to understand ageing and to make a difference to the quality of life of older people.
A SPARC is born

• **Unhappy environment 2001 - 2005**
  – House of Commons, then the Lords unhappy
    • lack of activity overall, poor leadership especially medical and social sciences
  – Subsequent government initiatives
    • poorly advised
    • lack engagement with real issues faced by older people - too intellectual

• **Stop wringing hands, take charge!**
  – **Supported by many research users**
    • professionals, charities, older people as well as researchers
  – **Research Councils approached**
    • to support a bottom-up community-led initiative
    • EPSRC and BBSRC responded very positively
SPARC - a community led initiative

• Early 2005 – late 2008
• EPSRC & BBSRC – modest £
  – Design and engineering research
  – Biological research
  – All areas in between -
    • bio-mechanics/ergonomics
    • muscle/bone
    • cognitive/sensory
    • Assistive Technology, etc

• Staffing
  – Two part-time coordinators
  – Two very part-time directors
SPARC – three themes

• Networking through:
  – workshops
  – international activities

• Advocacy

• Capacity Building through:
  – small research awards
Workshops

Regular workshops in collaboration with others

♦ Throughout the UK, some international
♦ Hosted by the community
  ♦ universities, firms, professional bodies, charities
♦ Focused on
  ♦ older people’s needs, issues & problems
  ♦ contribution of biology, design & engineering

A platform for all-comers

♦ Work of leading researchers on ageing
♦ Research of newcomers
♦ Perspectives of policy makers, practitioners and intermediaries
♦ Experiences of end users – older people
Workshops for all

• In one week in March 2007
  – *Ageing Research and Occupational Therapy: building partnerships, creating opportunities*
    • Jointly with the British Association of Occupational Therapists
  – *Anglo-Japanese Werner's Syndrome Consortium*
    • Tokyo
  – *Designs for a Caring Society*
    • British Polio Fellowship, Caversham Methodist Church Hall
Advocacy

- Making the case that:
  - older people are important
  - ageing research can and is making a difference
- Lobbying
- Developing a good track record
  - Some MPs do listen!
    - Two questions in Parliament on, Ageing Research and Older Workers
  - Ministers do listen (but Civil Servants don’t!)
    » Royal Patronage
    » HRH The Princess Royal participated in *Ageing Research and Occupational Therapy: building partnerships, creating opportunities*
Capacity building awards

- Small awards scheme for newcomers to ageing research

- 185 proposals total value £5.7m were considered in Summer 2005 & Spring 2006

- 34 were funded at total value £1.25m
  - for superior scientific excellence and capacity building
From furniture design to stem cells

• Projects
  – Furniture design, Smart homes, Adaptations
  – Better recovery from hip fracture
  – Design of the workplace for older people
  – Better packaging
  – Safer, more friendly streets
  – Computers that are easier to use
  – Assisting local government with transport planning
  – Keeping the car and driving safely
  – Regaining speech after stroke
  – Understanding automated telephone messages
  – Ageing eyes, Stepping safely, Following moving objects
  – Activity, Exercise, Nutrition in later life
  – Oxidative stress, Ageing cells, Stem cells, Lots of biology!
The 34 award holders
Today

• A unique experience
  – Lectures
  – Briefings
  – Displays
  – Demonstrations
  – Practical Classes
  – Advice
  – Lots of Networking

• Designed to bring everyone together
Thanks!

• Our Hosts, The London Borough of Camden
  – Camden Active Health Team
• Our Chairpeople, speakers, demonstrators and class leaders
• You, the participants

• And, of course, EPSRC and BBSRC
  www.sparc.ac.uk
The ultimate aim