



# Successful Aging

Stein Institute for Research on Aging

EST. 1983



## Holidays and Aging: Some Tips from UC San Diego Geriatric Specialists

BY DEBRA KAIN

*The joys, charms, chaos and confusion of family life during the holidays can be very positive or highly stressful, with older family members who are frail or ill particularly susceptible to negative consequences if emotional, mental or physical health needs are not taken into account.*

Specialists in senior medicine at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) School of Medicine offer some simple tips to help ensure that elderly family members with underlying health issues enjoy the season.

**1** Holidays provoke memories, which can be especially powerful in the later years of life. "Leading authorities have observed that memory and 'life review' are important parts of the aging process," says Barry

Lebowitz, Ph.D., deputy director of UCSD's Stein Institute for Research on Aging. "Older people whose memories are impaired may have difficulty remembering recent events, but they are often able to share stories and observations from the past. These shared memories are important for the young as well—children enjoy hearing about how it was 'when your parents were your age...'" He suggests using picture albums, family videos and music, even theme songs from old radio or TV programs, to help stimulate this sharing process.

**2** Plan ahead. If an older family member tires easily or is vulnerable to overstimulation, limit the activities or length of time he or she is included. Try to budget in a nap time, if necessary. Consider designating a "quiet room" where the older

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### FREE PUBLIC LECTURE

**NO LECTURE WILL BE HELD IN DECEMBER—HAPPY HOLIDAYS**

#### JANUARY

**The Inconstant Brain: Imaging Reveals Surprising Dynamic Change in Structure Across the Lifespan**

Terry L. Jernigan  
Professor of Psychiatry  
University of California, San Diego

January 21, 2009, 5:30 p.m.  
Garren Auditorium  
Basic Science Building  
University of California, San Diego

When MR imaging was first applied in brain research, it was thought that an initial postnatal growth spurt was followed by stability in brain structure for several decades, until the changes of old age occurred. New studies of healthy individuals revealed an unsuspected degree of dynamic change in brain tissues that suggest neuroadaptive alterations in response to pathogens, drugs, and even experience. These observations have had a major impact on how we view human brain structure, and they have important and wide-ranging implications regarding individual differences in personality, temperament, and cognition. This talk will review recent results and future research directions, with emphasis on plasticity in brain maturation and brain aging.

*Free parking is available.*

Please call (858) 534-6299 AT LEAST THREE WORKING DAYS IN ADVANCE to receive your free parking permit. Attendees may also purchase permits at the parking kiosk on Gilman Drive or park at the metered sites.

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## Holidays and Aging

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individual can take a break from the noise and confusion of a large family gathering, in order to avoid the irritability or exhaustion that may result from overstimulation. "Assign someone to be the day's companion to the older person, to make sure the individual is comfortable," suggests Daniel Sewell, M.D., medical director of the Senior Behavior Health Program at the UCSD Medical Center, adding that such guidelines are good for young children as well as adults with mental impairments.

**3** If a holiday get-together is in the home of a person with memory impairment or behavioral problems, don't rearrange the furniture. This could be a source of confusion and anxiety. If the gathering is in a new place, remove slippery throw rugs and other items that could present barriers to an individual who has difficulty walking. Provide lighting in order to help the older individual see at his or her optimum level and thereby avoid accidents related to tripping or bumping into difficult-to-see hazards.

**4** Avoid comments that might inadvertently embarrass someone who might be experiencing short-term memory problems. For example, if an older individual forgets a recent conversation, refrain from saying "Don't you remember?"

**5** In addition to memories, older individuals need something to anticipate. Add something new to the holiday celebration, or volunteer time as a family to help others. Enjoy activities that are free, such as taking a drive to look at holiday decorations, or a walk through the mall to window-shop.

**6** Involve everyone in the holiday meal preparation, breaking down tasks to include the youngest and oldest family members. "Older adults with physical limitations can still be included in kitchen activities by asking them to do a simple, helpful task, like greasing cooking pans, peeling vegetables or arranging flowers," says Sewell.

**7** Social connectedness is especially important at holiday times. "Reaching out to older relatives and friends who are alone is something all of us should do," says Lebowitz. "Loneliness is a difficult emotion for anyone. Recent research with older people has documented that loneliness is associated with major depression and with suicidal thoughts and impulses." Additionally, Dr. Sewell reminds us that, "when communicating with an older person, especially if hearing loss or memory problems are present, the tone of your voice may have more impact than your message. Since many older individuals are living with the inability to hear higher frequency sounds, lowering the pitch of your voice may help your communication be perceived as comforting, less threatening, and more easily understood. Speaking a little more slowly and looking directly at the person so your facial cues can be read may also increase comprehension. Do not talk about your loved one in the presence of others as if the loved one was not present. Your loved one may hear and comprehend everything you have said and may feel embarrassed or ashamed."

**8** Holiday blues are feelings of profound sadness that can be provoked by all the activities of the holiday season. Seasonal blues can have a particular impact in

the lives of older people, according to Lebowitz. "In some people, the 'holiday blues' represent the exacerbation of an ongoing depressive illness," he says. "Depression is a dangerous and life-threatening illness in older people. Tragically, suicide rates increase with age, specifically for older men. Depression is not a normal part of aging and should never be ignored or written off."\*

**9** Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) or winter depression is a similar illness that can be provoked by reductions in sunlight during the short days of winter. It is important for people confined indoors, especially those at risk for winter depression, to make time for activities that will increase exposure to daylight, according to Lebowitz.

**10** Physicians remind family members to adhere to the regular schedule of a senior's medications in the hustle and bustle of the holiday. Also pay attention to alcohol consumption during holiday parties and family gatherings, since alcohol can provoke inappropriate behavior or interfere with medications, according to Sewell.

"Older family members with special needs can get lost in the shuffle and chaos of happy family gatherings. So, with all the hustle and bustle of the season, just remember to be sensitive and loving. And plan ahead," he suggests.

*\*According to experts at UCSD's Stein Institute for Research on Aging, signs of depression—which are not always associated with sadness—include apathy, withdrawal, isolation, failure to thrive and agitation. Some other clues that older adults may be depressed are unexplained weight loss or pain, headache, fatigue or insomnia, or a higher than usual use of medical services.*

### Research Participants Needed

Dr. Colin Depp, Stein Institute for Research on Aging faculty member and researcher at UCSD, is seeking participants at least sixty years of age to take part in a study to understand the daily experiences, activities and associated emotions in older adults using a diary method known as the Day Reconstruction Method. Using a new survey procedure, participants will be asked to recall the previous day's events and answer a series of questions about their day's experiences. The majority of the assessment is self-administered and can be completed at home. If you are interested in participating or have additional questions, please call Ashley Cain at (858) 822-7485.

# In Memory of Jackuelyn Harris

BY MELANIE COLLINS

*Jackuelyn Harris, M.D., retired UCSD associate professor of psychiatry, passed away on October 10, 2008. Dr. Harris received her M.D. from Bowman Gray School of Medicine and completed her residency at UCSD. She was the first fellow in the UCSD/VA geriatric psychiatry fellowship program, the first of its kind in the nation. Dr. Harris was also the first UCSD fellow to take the board certification exam in geriatric psychiatry.*



Jackuelyn Harris, M.D.

Upon completion of her fellowship, Dr. Harris joined the faculty at UCSD. She went on to secure several important federal grants and ultimately became the co-director of both the geriatric psychiatry fellowship program and UCSD's prestigious NIMH-funded research center. Dr. Harris published fifty-two papers, including publications in every major journal in psychiatry, and eleven book chapters.

In addition, Dr. Harris was a skilled clinician. Her true passion was caring for elderly patients. She established what has now become a premier clinical geriatric psychiatry program. Jackuelyn Harris was responsible for the growth and development of UCSD's Geriatric Psychiatry program in a way that no one else has been. Her influence is still felt today, and she will be sorely missed.

The John A. Hartford Foundation Center of Excellence at UCSD—one of only two such centers in the U.S.—provides scholarships to new academicians (Hartford Scholars) in geriatric psychiatry. In honor of Dr. Harris, the recipients of these awards will now be called the Jackuelyn Harris Hartford Scholars.

Dr. Harris is survived by her husband, Robert Wailes, M.D., and by her three children: Dustin, Shannon, and Shelby. Jackuelyn's family has established the Jackuelyn Harris Memorial Fund through the National MS Society. More information on this memorial fund can be found at <http://main.nationalmssociety.org/goto/Jackuelyn.Harris.memorial.fund>.



## Lecture Spotlight

Dr. Robert Weinreb gave a spectacular presentation on the diagnosis and treatment of glaucoma to a large audience at the Stein Institute's Public Lecture in October. Many of Dr. Weinreb's patients were in attendance. Included is Jody DeLaPena Murphy, M.B.A., Director of Community Relations for the Stein Institute, Dr. Robert Weinreb, Harmohina "Mona" Bagga and Nils Loewen, Senior Clinical Research Fellows

## Free Public Lecture

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From Interstate 5 North or South:

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- From parking lot, walk towards Medical Teaching Facility (MTF)
- Right through MTF and enter Basic Science Building through glass doors
- Left down first hallway

## Honor Roll of Stein Institute for Research on Aging Contributors

We would like to express our deep appreciation for all those listed, as well as the anonymous donors, who chose to provide support to the Sam and Rose Stein Institute for Research on Aging during the months of mid-October through mid-November 2008. Thank you, also, to all of our donors who have made generous contributions through United Way. While we have no way to identify and thank you personally, we want you to know how much we appreciate your support!

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# Meet This Month's Successful Ager—Marie Buckley

BY MELANIE COLLINS

*Marie Buckley hasn't had the easiest time the past few years. She was the caretaker for Bob, her husband—and the love of her life—through a protracted illness. Then came the loss she experienced when he died in late 2006. When you meet Marie, though, there is no doubt that at eighty-five she's finding ways to move on and recreate her life. The same attitudes and behaviors that have helped her thrive throughout her life are helping her through this transition as well.*

Marie credits a few habits for her successful aging process. The first is exercise. Marie's message is "find some physical activity you like and make it a part of your life." In her youth, Marie was always physically active, walking to school during the school year and swimming and boating during summer. She played tennis in her thirties and forties. At fifty, when she read about the importance of resistance training for women, she joined a gym and started using weights and attending stretch classes. She has come to believe that stretching is an important part of her fitness. She also added jogging three times per week and taking nature hikes.

*Find some physical activity you like and make it a part of your life.*

At fifty-seven, during one of several motor home trips she and Bob took, she hiked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. When she gave up jogging, she switched to walking three times per week, lifting weights and stretching on alternate days. When pain from spinal stenosis interrupted her exercise regimen, she joined a gym with a pool and swam three times per week, and continued to attend stretch classes. Recently, she has gotten stronger and has been able to return to some walking.

While Marie believes that exercise is good for her brain as well as the rest of her body, she makes an effort to use her mind in other ways too. For example, she reads the newspaper regularly and keeps up with current events.

Next is attitude, which Marie says, "is everything." She regularly practices gratitude for all the good things in her life. When she faces problems, she makes a habit of reminding herself to let go of worrying. And she has a strong network of positive-thinking, like-minded people for friendship and support.

In addition to physical and mental exercise and attitude, Marie keeps up with changing times. She believes it is important to have friends of all ages, and she makes it



Marie Buckley

a point to stay 'interested and interesting.' She's been an activist for social and political causes since college. She participates in committees at her church. She engages in activities that lift her spirits, such as socializing, "I found out I'm an extrovert because being with people gives me energy." She also enjoys birdwatching, attending live theater and concerts, and listening to jazz music on the radio.

And though she thought she had said goodbye to love, it re-entered her life when she least expected it. Marie has been in a happy, fulfilling relationship with a wonderful man for the past year, and this has made her network of friendship and support even wider.

## Do You Know Someone Who Is a Great Example of Successful Aging?

As part of the newly revised newsletter, the Stein Institute has added a new feature highlighting examples of successful aging within our local community. We welcome your nominations. If you know of someone aged eighty-five or older who you feel is an example of successful aging, please contact Jody DeLaPena-Murphy at (858) 822-1132 or [jodelapena@ucsd.edu](mailto:jodelapena@ucsd.edu) with the name and contact info of the person you would like to nominate, along with a brief description of why you feel he/she is successfully aging. From these nominations, we will select some of these individuals to be interviewed, with their responses included in future editions of the newsletter!

# The Stein Institute's MSTAR Program: Training over Sixty Medical Students in Aging Research During the Last Four Years

*In order to meet the demands of our ever-increasing older adult population, we need more doctors to choose geriatrics as their area of focus. At the very least, more medical students need training experience in this specialty, as nearly all medical doctors will provide care for older adults sometime in their career. Research on aging is yet another pressing need. What else can we learn about the complex aging process and individual differences in how we age? How can we better manage the myriad of age-related diseases and perhaps, more ideally, prevent them from occurring in the first place? How can we assist individuals in maximizing their aging experience?*



*MSTAR students during the presentation event*

The Stein Institute for Research on Aging's Medical Student Training in Aging Research (MSTAR) program continues our tradition of assisting medical students interested in

choosing careers that involve geriatrics and/or aging-related research. Since its start in 2005, over sixty students from all over the United States have conducted research training right here at UCSD. These students participate in this program in the earlier phase of medical school—during the summer following the completion of their first year. Their research training is completed at a time when many are still exploring the multiple avenues available to them.

UCSD is one of only a handful of universities to offer the MSTAR program. The program is made available to students as a result of grant support provided by the National Institute on Aging (NIA), with the American Federation for Aging Research (AFAR) and the John A. Hartford Foundation serving as co-sponsors. As part of the MSTAR program, participants are provided

a unique opportunity to conduct eight-to-twelve weeks of hands-on, aging-related research alongside a UCSD faculty member.

The areas of research selected by participants have varied extensively from projects in Family and Preventive Medicine and Neurosciences to areas such as Bioengineering, Ophthalmology, and Surgery. Some students have focused on clinical projects working with people, while others have busied themselves in a lab working with animals or looking into a microscope. The breadth of projects has made for an exciting program, with students coming together for a common cause, yet with varied interests.

In addition to their individual research training experiences, students participate in a variety of activities that help shape their aging-related knowledge while teaching valuable research skills. These activities range from learning the importance of research ethics and how to write a paper or conduct a presentation, to discovering the perks of a research and/or geriatrics career while balancing work and a personal life. Clinical exposure in geriatrics is also an important feature of the program for

many students. One of the highlights of the MSTAR program has been the students' field trip to UCSD Medical Center's exceptional Senior Behavioral Health program, where they have an opportunity to meet with Medical Director Daniel Sewell, M.D., and observe case conferences conducted by the program's multidisciplinary team. This experience alone has been influential in steering the course of some of the student participants' career goals.

*UCSD is one of only a handful of universities to offer the MSTAR program.*



*MSTAR student, Johanna Estrada presenting her research*

At the conclusion of the summer program, participating medical students give an oral presentation summarizing their individual research projects in front of their peers and participating faculty members.

Many students successfully contribute as an author on papers to be published in select academic journals. In addition, all students complete a poster highlighting

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## About MSTAR

During the last four years, the MSTAR program has continuously gained popularity, with an increasing number of applicants to the UCSD program each year and outstanding reviews by students and faculty mentors. The success of this program will be monitored in the years to come by tracking the individual career paths of student participants. The first group of MSTAR participants just graduated from medical school in 2008. Already, we know that many of them are planning to incorporate research into their careers. A handful even extended their medical school training by taking an entire year to devote to research training.

The quality of all of the student participants in the MSTAR program has been outstanding! There is no doubt that the medical field will be enhanced with the addition of these future doctors caring for older adults, and as research scientists unveiling new information about the aging process. Congratulations to all of the students who have completed the MSTAR program!

# One of the Greatest Challenges Ahead: Aging of Population

Prior to the recent presidential election, the San Diego Union-Tribune newspaper solicited local scientists, doctors, teachers, and other professionals for their ideas on what issues the next U.S. president should make as his top priorities once elected and in office. Dilip Jeste, M.D., director of the Stein Institute, was featured in this article, and expressed his views on the challenges to be faced with our aging population. A portion of this article is included here. To view the article in its entirety, please visit the Union-Tribune website at <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/features/20081113-9999-1c13preslong1.html>

*I believe one of the greatest challenges as well as opportunities for the next president will be the unprecedented demographic changes in the United States and across the world.*

The oldest baby boomers will turn 65 on the watch of this president – in the year 2011. Over the following two decades, there will be a profound demographic transformation of the population on a scale never seen before in the human history. The new president can make a real difference using a visionary approach to an age-old issue.

What should the new president do in this matter in the first days and months of his term? He should appoint a Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) who is knowledgeable about the issues related to older Americans. Other major appointees in the HHS, including the Surgeon General and the director of the National Institutes of Health, should also have at least some expertise in the area of aging.

In the past, there have been several White House Conferences on Aging, and these have been variably successful in terms of coming up with recommendations for changes in national policies. However, the implementation of suggested changes has been weak.

A new conference of this type should be given a task such as developing short-term and long-term strategic plans for the next two decades that incorporate a global

approach, and more importantly, there should be a standing committee that ensures that the recommendations are implemented.

The number of Americans over age 65 will increase from the current 40 million to 70 million by 2030. The fastest growing segment of the population will be that of the oldest old, those over the age of 85. The proportion of ethnic minority elderly people will rise faster than that of elderly Caucasians. Of course, women will outnumber men in this age group.

This remarkable demographic shift is generally viewed with concern and alarm about its impact on Social Security, healthcare (including Medicare), housing, jobs for younger generations, etc. Yet, I think this is really a grand opportunity to make positive use of the growing elderly population so that the new era, dubbed by some as the “Silver Tsunami,” can be labeled the Golden Wave. Instead of looking at the seniors as a societal burden, we should view them as an outstanding resource.

Aging does not equate gloom and doom. Recent basic and clinical research shows that successful aging is not just possible, but is much more common than one thinks, and can become a norm if we take the right steps.

The most important advance in neuroscience in the past 15 years has been the demonstration of neuroplasticity of aging – the fact that brain growth and development continue into old age. Furthermore, such a positive outcome is related, not so much to the genes we inherit from our parents, but to our behavior, attitude, and environment.

With appropriate physical activities, targeted nutrition, and psychosocial stimulation along with necessary healthcare and social support, successful aging need not be a dream, but can become a widespread reality. As the quality of life of elderly people improves,

they become more productive, and contribute more to the rest of the society.

The healthcare costs of successful agers are far lower than those of people who spend the last several years of their lives in institutions.

The studies we have been doing at UCSD’s Stein Institute for Research on Aging, as well as investigations at some other centers in the United States, show that older individuals who keep their bodies and brains active are happier and more productive than others. The seniors who learn and teach can be wonderful mentors for younger generations.

Old age is not necessarily the age for retirement, but can be time for second careers and new ventures. After all, a mind (including an older mind) is a terrible thing to waste. The decades of experience that

an elderly individual has typically leads to wisdom, emotional equanimity, rational decision-making and mature creativity.

A concern that working elderly will take jobs away from youths is misplaced. The types of work in which older people excel are

generally different from those favored by their younger peers. For example, speed may require youth whereas accuracy may warrant age-associated experience. Thus, research has found that older pilots may be slower but are more successful in avoiding accidents than younger ones because of their vast repertoire of experience.

Some of the seniors will prefer volunteer work, while others would welcome paid jobs. Retraining of older workers to make them suitable for new jobs is likely to be highly productive because older workers tend to be hard-working, conscientious, reliable, collegial and take fewer sick days off than those who are many years younger.

Elderly citizens can lead efforts at social entrepreneurship in a collaborative manner.

*Recent basic and clinical research shows that successful aging is not just possible, but is much more common than one thinks.*

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## MSTAR Program

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their research and are provided an opportunity to present their posters at the annual American Geriatrics Society conference. This experience provides them with a chance to not only present their research findings in a professional setting, but also an opportunity to network with other physi-

cians and medical students with an interest in aging. UCSD student participants in the MSTAR program also present their research during an annual poster presentation held on the UCSD campus. This year's poster presentation will be held on the evening of January 8, 2009. Anyone with an interest is welcome to contact Jennifer Reichstadt, program director, at (858) 534-1226 or [jreichst@ucsd.edu](mailto:jreichst@ucsd.edu) for further details.

## Aging of Population

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Many seniors today can use computers and Internet, especially as such gadgets have become more user-friendly. Telecommuting has reduced the transportation problems that many older people have.

Aging is associated with increasing – not decreasing – heterogeneity. In other words, older people differ among themselves more than they did when they were younger. This means that we should not view all those over 65 as one homogeneous group, but rather as multiple subgroups with different assets and needs.

For example, with the growing number of ethnic minority elderly, there will be dif-

ferent cultural issues that will affect their healthcare, housing, transportation, and other needs. With the mental health parity in insurance having become a law, our goal must be to make sure that no older adult is left behind, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, education, health status, or income level.

As President Kennedy said in 1963, the new president should ask himself: "If not now, when, and if not us, who?" It will be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a new president to take charge of the country at a time of dramatic demographic changes and convert what is typically perceived as a crisis into an opportunity to chart new pathways.

Economic crises and wars come and go, but issues such as aging transcend the entire human history.

## ENCORE: The charitable IRA legislation is back for a repeat performance—don't miss this second-chance opportunity to make tax-free gifts from your IRA!

There's good news for individuals aged 70½ or older with individual retirement accounts. Thanks to the extended charitable IRA legislation, you can once again make outright gifts using IRA funds without tax complications up to \$100,000 per year.

If you are required to receive minimum distributions from your IRA and you do not need the money for personal use, consider using those funds as a charitable gift. While you cannot claim a charitable deduction for the IRA gifts, you will not pay income tax on the amount. Gifts must be completed by December 31, 2009.

This is an excellent opportunity to give to the Sam and Rose Stein Institute for Research on Aging at UC San Diego! If you have any questions or would like a free copy of our brochure, *Use Your IRA the Smart Way*, please contact Geoff Graham, at (858) 822-6619 or visit our website at [www.plannedgiving.ucsd.edu](http://www.plannedgiving.ucsd.edu).



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Robert N. Weinreb, M.D.

Dec. 11 9:00 p.m.  
Dec. 12 10:00 p.m.  
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Dec. 16 11:00 a.m.  
Dec. 16 7:00 p.m.  
Dec. 17 2:00 a.m.  
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Dec. 19 8:00 a.m.  
Dec. 20 3:00 p.m.  
Dec. 21 7:00 a.m.

### Research on Aging: Novel Approaches to the Treatment of Alzheimer's Disease

Nazneen Dewji, Ph.D.

Dec. 26 11:00 p.m.  
Dec. 28 5:00 p.m.  
Dec. 30 7:00 p.m.

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Daniel Kripke, M.D.

Dec. 23 11:00 a.m.  
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## Happy Holidays From Your Friends at the Stein Institute for Research on Aging!



*Pictured from left to right: Sanja Kovacevic, Ph.D.; Sharron Dawes, Ph.D.; Lisa Eyler, Ph.D.; Colin Depp, Ph.D.; Ashley Cain; Ipsit Vahia, M.D.; Lisa Damron; Faraz Yaghouti; Jennifer Leich, M.A.; Juliana Scales; Yu-Ling Chang, Ph.D.; Rael Cahn, Ph.D.; Laura Dugan, M.D.; Maureen Halpain, M.S.; Dilip V. Jeste, M.D.; Jody DeLaPena-Murphy, M.B.A.; Jennifer Reichstadt, M.S.; Shahrokh Golshan, Ph.D.; Wesley Thompson, Ph.D.; Nancy Yue; Sandra Dorsey; Elizabeth Twamley, Ph.D.*

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