

### Director's Note

One of the things we hear most often from people about getting older is “I don’t want to be a burden.” Of all the health problems that we face as we age, the most burdensome is Alzheimer’s disease (AD) and related dementias. A recent study in the New England Journal of Medicine based on data from our Health and Retirement Study (HRS) found that the disease’s economic cost was over \$200 billion per year. Over half of that came from putting a price tag on the time spent without payment by family members caring for patients with dementia. Until recently, dementia research received far less funding than other diseases, with little progress in developing treatments or preventions for it. That is finally beginning to change.

As the population grows older in the decades ahead, we can expect a large growth in the number of people with AD and dementia, because the risk for these conditions is much higher as we get older. In response, governments have begun to make dementia research a major priority. Congress unanimously passed the National Alzheimer’s Project Act which went into effect in 2011, directing new US government efforts to improve treatments and prevention and to collect data to track progress of these efforts. The US National Institutes of Health recently allocated a significant amount of funding to support new research on AD and dementia. The G8 Dementia Summit was held in London in 2013 in recognition of the growing global impact of AD and dementia. Finally, the World Health Organization recently declared dementia to be a ‘public health priority’ for all countries.

The private sector is also responding. The US-based

Alzheimer’s Association ([www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)) has supported research for some time. Last month, Atlantic Philanthropies made massive investments in a new Global Brain Health Institute ([www.GBHI.org](http://www.GBHI.org)). The data collected by HRS and our international partner studies will be used by GBHI researchers to better understand, and hopefully slow down, the global dementia epidemic.

The HRS will continue to be a key study that researchers and policy-makers use to understand the impact of dementia on patients, families, and programs like Medicare and Social Security. The longitudinal nature of the HRS is especially important when studying a condition like dementia which usually develops and progresses over many years. A major challenge for understanding dementia is to better understand what happens to the brain with normal aging. That requires studying everyone in the population, not just those who may be developing problems. To increase the amount of information in the HRS that can be used to better understand the aging brain and dementia, we will be inviting some of you to participate in a supplemental study in 2016 collecting additional information about memory and thinking. This study is being developed in cooperation with HRS sister studies around the world to create a truly global understanding of this most challenging disease.

Thank you, as always, for your time and dedication.

David Weir, Director  
Health and Retirement Study



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# Long Work Hours and Weight Gain

Working long hours has some potential benefits such as higher earnings and more career advancement. But these benefits may come with a cost. A recently published report used HRS data to look at the impact of long work hours on weight gain between 1992 and 2010.

Over that period, individuals who worked more than 60 hours per week in the past year were more likely to experience a 10 percent weight gain compared to those who worked fewer hours. Only about 8% of HRS participants worked more than 60 hours per week.

From: Murat Anil Mercan, *Research on Aging*, 2014



## Couples Influence Each Other to Quit Smoking

Married couples are often alike in many ways, including sharing habits like cigarette smoking. It is also well documented that health events such as a heart attack or a diagnosis of cancer often lead smokers to quit. But do health events that happen to one partner affect the smoking status of the other partner? Using HRS data on health events and smoking over many years, researchers found that indeed when one member of a married couple experiences a health event and quits smoking afterward, their spouse is likely to quit smoking as well. This is especially true when it is the husband who experiences a health event.

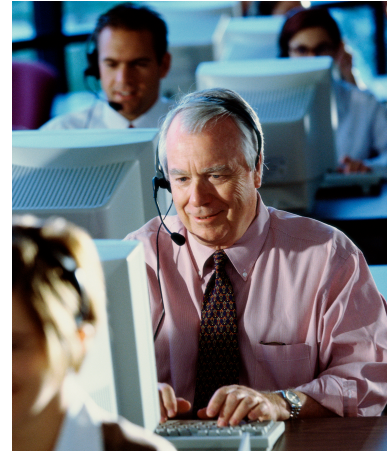
From: Kerry Anne McGeary, *Eastern Economic Journal*, 2015





# Volunteering in Retirement: Does being Conscientious Matter?

Conscientious people tend to be responsible, organized, and hardworking. What happens when conscientious people retire? Are they able to direct their motivation and efforts into new, meaningful activities or does that drive become frustrated? Researchers used HRS to compare conscientious people before and after they retired. Conscientious people were more likely to take up new volunteer activities after retirement compared to other new retirees. The aspect of conscientiousness that was most associated with volunteering was achievement striving. Volunteering may help high striving individuals fill their time with meaningful activity in retirement.



From: Anissa Mike and others, *Journal of Research on Personality*, 2014

## Connecting Through Social Network Sites

Does using social network sites like Facebook and Twitter make us feel closer to friends and family? Researchers used HRS data to look at the association between our use of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, and other aspects of our social networks, like how much support we feel from friends and family and how connected we feel socially. Using social media was modestly related to perceived support from children but strongly related to greater perceived support from friends. Use of social media is also associated with feeling more socially connected, and the strength of this relationship increases as people age.

From: Rebecca P. Yu and others, *Ageing and Society*, 2015



# Mentally Challenging Jobs May Keep Us Sharp in Retirement

Mental alertness and focus are an important part of many jobs. But do jobs that demand more of us mentally also help us stay more alert after we retire? To answer this question, researchers used information on the mental requirements of jobs held by HRS participants. These requirements included analyzing data, developing objectives and strategies, making decisions, solving problems, evaluating information and thinking creatively.

People who had worked in jobs with greater mental demands were more likely to have better memories before they retired and more likely to have slower declines in memory after retiring than people who had worked in jobs with fewer mental demands. Interestingly, these differences increased as retirement went on. These results accounted for differences in things that could be associated with mental functioning such as health, depression, economic status and education.

From: Gwenith G. Fisher and others, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 2014



## Living to 100

The number of people living to the age of 100 in the United States has nearly doubled in the past 20 years to around 72,000. It is likely to double again by 2020. Researchers used information from HRS to learn more about the health and functioning of those who live to age 100, or centenarians.

About 23% of centenarians reach the age of 100 with no self-reported diseases and 18% reported no difficulties with physical functioning such as walking and climbing stairs and daily tasks such as bathing and dressing. About 23% of centenarians reached age 100 with no major chronic disease and approximately the same number reported no disability (18%). An astonishing 55% reached age 100 mentally alert.

From: Jennifer A. Ailshire and others, *Journals of Gerontology: Medical Sciences*, 2015







## We Keep Your Information Confidential

All of the research procedures used by the University of Michigan are designed to ensure that your confidentiality and anonymity are protected at each stage of the research—from data collection to public dissemination. Very careful safeguards are built into everything we do. All employees who work for our study sign a pledge of confidentiality to adhere to these procedures and safeguards.

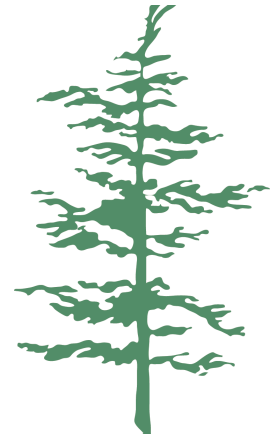
## Have You Moved?

Have you changed address or phone number? Please call or write to us at the toll free number or address listed to the right. You can also e-mail us at [HRS-QandA@umich.edu](mailto:HRS-QandA@umich.edu) with any changes. And be sure to check the HRS Participant website for updates as well! Visit the participant website at <http://hrsparticipants.isr.umich.edu/>

## Thank You for Staying with Us over the Years

Getting older for most of us is a process of slow changes. We want to keep up with you and the changes in your life and the best way to do that is often just to ask many of the same things every time we see you. Maybe some things haven't changed for you, and that's just as important as knowing what has changed.

Fast or slow, old or young, all of your lives are important to us. Answering these questions over time is a valuable way that you contribute to understanding the issues we are all facing. Thank you for your continued participation and support!



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