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Media Statement

LIFTING THE BURDEN OF AGE

A bad attitude towards ageing is causing the 'problem' of an ageing population in Western Australia, according to a world-renowned health expert who says our biggest hurdle is the perception of ageing as a burden.

Here to present at a WA Centre for Health and Ageing (WACHA) seminar for health professionals, Netherlands Professor Rudi Westendorp said living longer should be viewed as a success, rather than a weight on the State.

"Western Australia, as does the Netherlands, needs a mind change - we keep on living longer which is a success of having organised our societies so well compared to earlier times or other contemporary countries, but the biggest problem is that we do not appreciate it that way," he said.

"An ageing population provides new opportunities that have not yet been explored, including economic productivity, consumer markets, grand-parenting, and enjoying old age."

Professor Westendorp also said WA's obesity rates presented a problem as the population aged.

"Obesity affects the quality of life, more than it kills you, and that's the worst scenario – living longer, in misery," he said.

"There is a lot to say for boosting preventive measures – repair is far more difficult and what is lost is lost forever, so the main message is 'don't wear out your body'."

Professor Westendorp offered three steps to create a mindset for ageing well that everyone should adopt, as early as possible:

1. Remember you only live once, and longer than you may have thought.
2. See the challenge, the opportunity, and keep making plans.
3. Avoid the extremes: not too much, not too little, which holds true for almost everything, from physical exercise, alcohol and food to temperament.

Based at the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR), WACHA Director Professor Leon Flicker said it was a privilege that Professor Westendorp would share his experience with WA's health researchers and professionals.

"Professor Westendorp has such an extensive knowledge of how our bodies age, why we age and what we can do to maintain longevity, it's a real opportunity to hear what he has to share from a research perspective," he said.

"I'm certain his presentation will be hugely valuable to WA health professionals – collaborations and seminars like this are vital in improving our capacity to care for and improve the health of our community as we age."

On Monday September 1, Professor Westendorp will present 'Playing the longevity game: the evidence behind increasing lifespan and healthspan' a free seminar hosted by WACHA and the WA Division of Australian and New Zealand Society of Geriatric Medicine for health and medical professionals, academics and students.

For reservations, please contact WACHA at wacha@uwa.edu.au or call (08) 9224 2993.

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