

# Alzheimer Society

S A S K A T C H E W A N

## Graduate Scholarship Fosters Dementia Research

Through our educational opportunities, support and awareness, we achieve our motto of **Help for Today**. To ensure we can provide *Hope for Tomorrow*, we fund research which focuses on a cause, cure and improving quality of life for people living with dementia.

One of our *Hope for Tomorrow* initiatives is the Alzheimer Society Graduate Student Award, which supports a graduate student at the University of Regina's Centre on Aging and Health (CAH). Commencing in 2011, the CAH awards the Alzheimer Society Graduate Student Award for \$5,000 yearly through a peer review process. "The Graduate Scholarship is important for attracting and retaining high quality graduate student researchers," says Scott J. Wilson, Administrator for the Centre on Aging and Health." Wilson feels, "Amidst times of diminishing research funding, awards such as this are crucial to the University of Regina and the Centre on Aging and Health, both of which support better and increased graduate student research and learning."

In 2011, Heather Eritz was also the recipient of an Alzheimer Society of Canada Doctoral Scholarship. She is also the 2013-2014 recipient of the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan Graduate Student Award.

Eritz is a PhD student in the clinical psychology program and works with Dr. Thomas Hadjistavropoulos at the Health Psychology Laboratory.

Her main research interests relate to nurse empathy, personhood in dementia, and aggressive behaviours in dementia. Her dissertation focuses on an intervention intended to

decrease aggressive behaviours and increase quality of life among residents of long-term care who experience dementia. This intervention will present the life history of the individual to staff members, with the focus on life history and providing life history to staff members. Eritz expects that there will be a change in how care is provided. By putting the person first and the disease second, aggressive behaviours should decrease and quality of life should increase. Eritz hopes her dissertation findings will provide support for an inexpensive intervention. If such an intervention is determined to be effective, it could be used in long-term care facilities to help increase the quality of life of residents with dementia.

Heather's interest in aging developed early, as her grandparents were always a large part of her life. It wasn't until she began her program of research in graduate school that she became interested in dementia as an issue of aging.

"While pursuing other research projects in Long Term Care, I became interested in methods for improving the quality of life of the residents - most of whom had been diagnosed with dementia," Eritz explains. "I think it is very important to implement programs and interventions that are designed for individuals with dementia to help them live the best life they can, despite their diagnosis."



Since 2002, the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan has worked in partnership with the University of Regina's Centre on Aging and Health (CAH), a proficient facilitator of gerontology research. The Society and the CAH work collaboratively by exchanging resources and expertise to educate people about healthy aging and conditions related to aging, such as Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

A memorandum of understanding was recently signed, that ensures both

organizations will continue to do their best to further research and educational endeavours to better the lives of those dealing with Alzheimer's disease. Wilson remarks, "As the population of Saskatchewan (and Canada) ages, such collaborations become even more essential."

The Centre on Aging and Health is a collaborative effort at the University of Regina, with representation from many academic disciplines including Psychology, Kinesiology and Health Studies, Social Work and many others. The CAH's primary mandates include enhancing gerontological research, graduate education, and public outreach.

Congratulations and good luck to Heather as she continues her doctoral research. We look forward to seeing the results of her research.