

YOUR AGEING BRAIN - USE IT OR LOSE IT

The meeting was organised by the Sevenoaks and Knole U3A Science Groups and was open to U3A members across Kent; over 170 attended. Four speakers from Bulgaria, The Netherlands, the UK and the USA, all currently working as part of the Cambridge Centre for Ageing and Neurosciences (cam-CAN) joined us at the Orchard Conference Centre to review this topic. Dr Meredith Shafto discussed the changes in cognitive function that happen to all our brains as we age, Dr Kamen



Tsvetanov analysed the changes in brain structure and function that are causing these and Dr Linda Geerligs told us about the effects that physical exercise and mental training have on these processes. Finally Dr David Nesbitt described what happens when normal ageing processes go wrong and we end up with dementia.

The key take home messages provided by our speakers were clear:

- Ageing is a development process, rather than a disease and most people are doing this healthfully, though with diversity across abilities and individuals (Meredith Shafto);
- Ageing can have a considerable impact on brain structure and function, but these changes are neither universal nor inevitable (Kamen Tsvetanov);
- With ageing, the balance in the brain network shifts from segregation (which is good) to integration (which is less good). Mental exercise improves the practice task but does not necessarily transfer to other tasks; physical exercise has positive effects on many cognitive functions (Linda Geerligs);
- Dementia is not an inevitable consequence of ageing; age for age, incidence is decreasing; most of us will not develop it. Many things, including regular exercise, a healthy diet and lots of social interactions will help prevent it (David Nesbitt).

The bottom line is clear: being in the U3A provides multiple opportunities to use your brain in all the right ways and thus not to lose it !

Win Gutteridge and Bob Ruffles June 2016