Our Long Tradition of Public Health Research

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It is highly likely that the people of our community have contributed more to health-related research than any other place in the world. It all started in 1921 with three research projects associated with the Washington County Health Demonstration. The first tried to determine how normal children grow—something almost unknown at the time. Another studied illnesses associated with cement production—a pioneering industrial health project.

The third, the Hagerstown Morbidity Survey, attempted to determine the incidence of certain illnesses in the local community. This survey showed that overall sickness rates were more common among the poor than the well-to-do; but, strangely, contagious diseases were more common among children living in more comfortable homes than in poor homes. Among older people, flu, rheumatism, and nervous diseases were more common among the poor, while heart disease and stroke rates were higher among the well-to-do. This interview method of keeping track of illnesses among the general public was widely copied and made Hagerstown world-famous in public health circles.

By participating in the GEM Study, you are continuing our community’s proud tradition of helping to improve the nation’s health. Thank you!

Call the Johns Hopkins University if you would like to find out more about participating in the Ginkgo Evaluation of Memory (GEM) Study. We’d love to hear from you!

Call 301-733-8860 and ask to speak to someone about joining the GEM Study.

Spread the word! We still need to enroll new participants in the GEM Study. Tear out this card and give it to a friend or family member who might be interested in joining. Thanks!

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Common Questions about Warfarin, Coumadin, and Aspirin

- **If I start taking warfarin or Coumadin, do I need to stop taking the GEM Study pills?**

  Yes. You should also call the clinic (301-733-8860) to let us know you’ve stopped taking the GEM Study pills. If you later stop taking warfarin or Coumadin, you may be able to resume taking the GEM Study pills.

- **May I take aspirin while participating in the GEM Study?**

  Yes!
Proxies in the GEM Study: A Little Help Goes a Long Way!

In many research studies, participants name a proxy whose role is to provide information about the participant’s health, in the event that they cannot provide it for themselves. However, in the GEM Study, proxies play a different, much more significant role; in GEM, proxies are critical to ensuring that the study results are accurate.

Why is the role of the proxy so crucial? Well, GEM is a study of memory changes or problems that can occur as we age. These changes can affect our ability to complete daily activities, as well as our perception of these abilities. People who have problems with memory or thinking skills often under-report difficulties they may have with everyday activities. The more problems they have with memory and thinking, the more inaccurate their self-report becomes. In addition, people may not even be aware of their own limitations, especially if these limitations are subtle enough to work around. Thus, the proxy in the GEM Study is a checkpoint—an outside opinion of any changes in a participant’s memory and abilities over time.

Like you, your proxy will need to complete questionnaires about your memory, habits, and daily activities every six months for the rest of the study. To get things started, your proxy probably came with you to your first clinic visit; those who couldn’t make it were interviewed in their homes or by phone. We hoped that having your proxy come with you would give him a clear understanding of what study participation requires. Your proxy is not required to attend future clinic visits, but we would love to have her come in with you when she can. If your proxy cannot come to the clinic, we will contact him for a phone interview a few days before your appointment to obtain the information we need for your visit.

We are grateful for the time and effort you and your proxy give to GEM. Together, you are making an important contribution to the mental and physical health of older people. Thank you!

Have you lost the medications you took to your first clinic visit? If so, look in the “GEM” canvas bag we gave you. Lost that? Try the closet—that’s where other participants have found theirs!

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