

Emory University's School of Nursing Receives \$5.8 Million Renewal for Roybal Center for Dementia Family Caregiver Mastery

Dr. Kenneth W. Hepburn leads five more years of impactful research supporting family members and friends who provide care for persons living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementia illnesses.

ATLANTA, GA (October 10, 2024) – Emory University's Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing is proud to announce that the National Institute of Aging (NIA) has renewed the Emory Roybal Center for Dementia Caregiving Mastery (2P30AG064200-06). Led by Professor Ken Hepburn, PhD, this five-year extension totals \$5.8 million and will support continued behavioral intervention research aimed at enhancing the role-mastery of family members and friends who provide care for persons living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementia illnesses. The Center is co-directed by Dr. Molly Perkins, a tenured Professor and Gerontologist in the Division of Geriatrics and Gerontology in the School of Medicine. Dr. Perkins has extensive expertise in qualitative and mixed methods research, including large-scale mixed methods and qualitative formative evaluation, and directs the Center's evaluation efforts aimed at advancing the science of intervention development.

The demographic imperative for the Center's mission is the increasing prevalence of Alzheimer's disease and other dementia illnesses. These illnesses will affect perhaps 20 million Americans by 2050, and the number of family members and friends who provide care for them will likewise grow significantly, expanding to a projected 40-50 million individuals. Caregiving is a heterogeneous phenomenon. The challenges that caregivers face – and, therefore, the knowledge, skills, and sense of mastery they need to be effective in their role – are shaped by multiple intersecting factors of relationships, cultural expectations, caregivers' own identity choices and other family obligations, care recipient illness type and stage, and other social determinants (e.g., rurality)

The Center serves to nurture and support NIH Stage I-III trials of behavioral interventions to strengthen caregiver mastery within particular caregiving contexts. It will support investigators at Emory and across the U.S. to develop and test interventions that are designed to improve caregivers' abilities – within identified caregiving contexts – to guide the daily lives of those for whom they provide care, thereby improving the quality of life for those living with dementia illnesses, easing the burden on caregivers themselves, reducing reliance on institutional care, and helping to mitigate rising healthcare costs.

Building on the successes of its first research cycle, which funded 13 groundbreaking projects, the Center will support, in its first two years, two new clinical trials that are already in development. One focuses on the culturally grounded challenges faced by Latino caregivers; the other is aimed at caregivers whose person has just received a definitive diagnosis of a dementia illness: how to pull together a plan and a team to engage with a now clear reality. In its second year, the Center will begin to accept proposals for new clinical trial ideas. It has already launched a national Caregiver Research Interest Group that provides a platform for early-stage researchers to engage in meaningful discussions about behavioral interventions.

Dr. Hepburn, a Gerontologist, is a tenured Professor whose work recognizes the central role that families, friends, and communities play in caring for the increasing – and increasingly diverse – number of persons living with Alzheimer's disease and similar dementia illnesses. He sees family caregivers as occupying what is, in effect, a clinical role. Like all healthcare providers, caregivers need training and education to help them understand the conditions with which they are dealing, to develop skills and

strategies for day-to-day caregiving, and to strengthen their own sense of competence to enable them to carry out the role with confidence. He and colleagues from nursing and a wide range of disciplines have developed and tested programs designed to strengthen the capacity of informal caregivers to function effectively in their caregiving role in a manner that preserves their own health and well-being. Through a series of projects that, with support from the National Institute on Aging (NIA), the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR), and the national Alzheimer's Association, he and his colleagues have established the evidence base for the Savvy Caregiver Program and Tele-Savvy (an online version of Savvy), psychoeducation programs for caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's disease and other dementia disorders.

For more information on Dr. Hepburn, visit his [faculty profile](#). To learn more about the P30 Grant Award and the Center's first cycle accomplishments, visit the Roybal Center website (<https://www.emorycaregiving.org/>).

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About the School of Nursing

As one of the nation's top nursing schools, the Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing at Emory University is committed to educating visionary nurse leaders and scholars. Ranked the No. 1 master's, No. 2 BSN, and No. 6 DNP programs in the nation by U.S. News & World Report, the school is recognized as a Center of Excellence in Nursing Education by the National League of Nursing. The school offers undergraduate, master's, doctoral and non-degree programs, bringing together cutting-edge resources, distinguished faculty, top clinical experiences, and access to leading health care partners to shape the future of nursing and impact the world's health and well-being. Learn more at nursing.emory.edu.