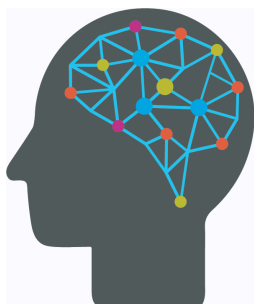


DRNI CONNECT  
Issue No. 23 - October 2024



## DEMENTIA RESEARCH NETWORK IRELAND

Prevention, Cure & Care for  
Neurodegenerative Diseases

Welcome to the 23th issue of

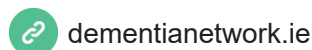
### DRNI CONNECT!

Celebrate Halloween with the 23rd issue of DRNI CONNECT 🎃

This edition sees information about the 14-country **STRAP Consortium report**, and a publication on a randomised control trial in the **SENSE-Cog** study. You can read about the DRNI/Alzheimer Society of Ireland event **The Science of Dementia for the Non-Scientist**, a **joint DRNI/ASI webinar** on disease-modifying therapies, and the recent **DRNI/DTI/ARUK collaborative symposium** on dementia trials in Ireland, Northern Ireland and the UK. You can also find out how to have your say in the **European Brain Council's public consultation** on developing an EU Coordination Plan for Brain Health. Finally, our Researcher in Focus is **Dr. Jari Pirhonen**, the first DRNI member based in Finland.

If you have any news, projects or events that you would like to see featured in DRNI CONNECT, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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### 1) **The Science of Dementia for the Non-Scientist**

On September 12th, DRNI and The Alzheimer Society of Ireland hosted an event entitled *The Science of Dementia for the Non-Scientist - An exploration of dementia and the brain*, featuring a lineup of experts and personal narratives. Helen Rochford-Brennan, global dementia ambassador, opened the day and shared her personal insights on the significance of research in her journey. The morning sessions began with Professor Sean Kennelly, Tallaght University Hospital who spoke about recent developments in dementia treatment from a clinical perspective. Following him, Dr. Claire Potter from Queen's University Belfast discussed the impact of brain health and psychological stress on memory in later life. Dr. Joe Kane then provided insights into Lewy body dementia, highlighting its unique characteristics compared to other forms of dementia.

This session was followed by personal insights of living with dementia, where Marguerite Keating and Janice Nolan-Palmer shared their experiences with dementia, facilitated by Nuala Paley. They were followed by the keynote address by Professor

In the afternoon, Professor Yvonne Nolan from University College Cork discussed the role of the gut microbiome in neurodegenerative diseases. Dr. Tim Dukelow addressed barriers to brain health specific to the Irish context, presenting potential solutions. Finally, Professor Catherine Blake from University College Dublin wrapped up the event by discussing the benefits of exercise for brain health.

**DRNI and The ASI want to sincerely thank all speakers and participants for making this event a success!** Thanks also to the sponsor of the event, the Health Research Board.



## 2) ASI webinar series 2024

On October 2nd, DRNI took part in The Alzheimer Society of Ireland webinar series *Dementia Dialogues: Breaking Down Research*. Professor Sean Kennelly, Tallaght University Hospital and Trinity College Dublin, spoke on latest advancements in disease-modifying therapies for dementia. His discussion highlighted some of the recent research developments, and offered insights into how the diagnosis of dementia may change in the future, chiefly in relation to biomarkers. Attendees also gained a deeper understanding of dementia and its impact on the brain.

The webinar can be viewed [HERE](#).

To find out more about the ASI webinar series and future webinars, please click [HERE](#).



### 3) DRNI/DTI/ARUK dementia trials research symposium

DRNI teamed up with our colleagues in [Dementia Trials Ireland](#) and [Alzheimer Research UK Northern Ireland](#) to host a joint symposium on dementia trials research in the beautiful surrounds of Queen's University Belfast.

The symposium brought together researchers to explore the latest advancements in dementia trials across Ireland, Northern Ireland and the UK. The morning session featured presentations by Professor Cath Mummery from University College London, who discussed the UK's NIHR dementia trials network. Next up was Professor Bernadette McGuinness who examined the Northern Irish context in dementia trials, followed by Dr. Anne-Marie Miller of Trinity College Dublin who spoke about the many achievements of Dementia Trials Ireland since its establishment. Queen's University Belfast's Professor Judy Bradley then introduced iREACH, a new capability in Northern Ireland that aims to strengthen local dementia research infrastructure. A panel discussion with all speakers followed the session.

The second half of the symposium saw Early Career Researchers present their research. Dr. Nicola Ann Ward, QUB, presented on the impact of a protein-enriched Mediterranean diet on cognitive health in older adults, and Sevinç Elif Şen of TCD spoke on how to assess Ireland's healthcare preparedness for new dementia treatments. Dr Calum Marr, QUB presented the RESIST study which explored cognitive change in rheumatoid arthritis patients, and finally Dr. Helena Dolphin of TCD spoke on transcutaneous vagus nerve stimulation as a potential intervention for amnesic mild cognitive impairment.

generation of dementia research innovators. Thanks to everyone who attended the symposium!

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#### 4) STRAP Consortium report

An international report funded by the Canadian Institute for Health Research (CIHR) and supported by the European Commission's Joint Programme on Neurodegenerative Disease Research (JPND) has highlighted the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on people with dementia and their care partners across 14 countries, including Ireland. Titled "Strategizing Transdisciplinary Research Priorities Around the Impact of COVID-19 Control Measures on People with Dementia and Care Partners Living at Home," the report highlights research priorities aimed at shaping policies that better support these vulnerable populations during public health emergencies. Input from Irish stakeholders, facilitated by the **Global Brain Health Institute**, brought attention to the isolation, increased anxiety, and heightened care burden experienced by people with dementia and their care partners during the pandemic.

Among the top research priorities identified in the report were issues related to mental health, physical health, disease progression, and the impacts on caregivers, underscoring a widespread need for more comprehensive support systems. In Ireland, as in other participating countries, access to routine healthcare and mental health resources became increasingly challenging for those with dementia, raising the urgency for policies that can more effectively address such barriers. The report serves as a critical resource for researchers and policymakers, both in Ireland and globally, providing a blueprint for developing interventions that will better support people with dementia and their caregivers in future crises.

For more information and to read the report, please click [HERE](#).

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### 5) SENSE-Cog - A randomised control trial

The recently concluded SENSE-Cog study, which started in 2016, aimed at improving mental well-being, cognitive function, and quality of life for people with dementia and sensory impairments (hearing and vision). A H2020 funded project, this initiative explored how sensory impairments impact dementia progression and develops targeted interventions, including sensory-cognitive rehabilitation and accessible support systems for patients and caregivers.

A recent publication in the Lancet Healthy Longevity outlines how a SENSE-Cog randomised controlled trial evaluated the impact of an 18-week sensory support intervention (SSI) on the quality of life in people with mild-to-moderate dementia experiencing hearing or vision difficulties. Conducted in five European countries, the intervention included personalised hearing and vision assessments, provision of sensory aids, and home-based support. Results showed no significant long-term improvement in quality of life scores compared to standard care. The study suggests that while sensory support may not improve quality of life directly, further exploration of sensory-cognitive health interventions in dementia care is recommended.

To read the publication, please click [HERE](#).

### 6) Researcher in Focus: Jari Pirhonen

This edition's Researcher in Focus is **Dr. Jari Pirhonen**, social scientist and lecturer at Tampere University and DRNI's first member based in Finland. Jari tells us about his research and talks about care needs, stigma and long-term care. To read more,





## Public Consultation: Towards an EU Coordination Plan for the Brain

### 7) EBC Public Consultation: EU Coordination Plan for Brain Health

The European Brain Council (EBC) has launched a public consultation aimed at developing a comprehensive EU Coordination Plan for Brain Health, inviting feedback from various stakeholders, including researchers and healthcare professionals. This initiative addresses the significant impact of brain disorders on healthcare systems and aims to foster a coordinated approach to brain health, research, and policy.

To have your say on topics relating to brain health research and to help influence policy, please click [HERE](#).



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