

PRESS RELEASE

More than 20% of people over 60 have some mental or neurological disorder

- The WHO predicts that between 2000 and 2050 the number of people over 60 in the world will double and the number of people over 80 will quadruple
- Dementia and depression are the most common neuropsychiatric disorders among this age group
- The first B-Debate *“Impact of Ageing on Mental Health and Well-being”* session will take place on Wednesday 29 January at CosmoCaixa Barcelona

Barcelona, 23 January 2014 – On 29 and 30 January, **B-Debate**, Parc Sanitari Sant Joan de Déu and Saint John of God Private Foundation for Research are bringing together national and international experts at CosmoCaixa Barcelona to debate the main factors involved in mental health and wellbeing in the ageing population, prevention and management strategies to improve quality of life among this group and their social and economic impact.

Ageing is a natural process, defined as the series of gradual, irreversible changes in the structure and function of an organism that occur as a result of the passage of time. Given the increase in life expectancy and the drop in the birth rate, the proportion of people over 60 is growing faster than any other age group in nearly every country. According to the World Health Organization, between 2000 and 2050 the proportion of the world's population over 60 will double, from 11% to 22%. In absolute terms, this age group will go from 605 million to 2,000 million people over this half century. For the first time in history, most middle-aged adults have living parents.

Increased life expectancy is a result of advances in the health sciences, but also of social and economic improvements that have allowed the public better access to healthcare. The challenge of this demographic trend will be to find a way to sustainably ensure that these years are spent in the best possible health and quality of life. Good health is key to the elderly staying independent and playing an active role in family life and their community.

More than 20% of people over 60 have some mental or neurological disorder (not including those that manifest as headaches) and 6.6% of disabilities in this age range are due to mental disorders and those of the nervous system. Dementia and depression are the most common neuropsychiatric disorders in this age group. Mental health influences and conditions the health of the rest of the body, and vice versa. For example, elderly people with cardiovascular disease are

more likely to suffer from depression than those without medical problems. To the contrary, untreated depression in an elderly person with heart disease can have a negative impact on their condition.

The mechanisms responsible for problems of mental health and wellbeing among this population aren't clear. To tackle this challenge, it is important to take into account that the burden and impact on mental health is not due to the ageing process alone. Other external factors present among this population also have an impact, like economic pressures, social factors, etc.

This is the context that gives rise to the concept of healthy ageing, understood to be the process of optimizing opportunities in terms of physical and mental health in order to allow the elderly, without discrimination, to play an active role in society and enjoy an independent, satisfactory, quality life. Healthy ageing begins with healthy habits earlier in life. These habits include eating, exercise and limiting exposure to health risks like tobacco, excess alcohol and toxic substances, among others. However, it's never too late to start: for example, according to the WHO, if a person quits smoking between 60 and 75, their risk of premature death drops 50%.

Helping tackle these great challenges facing society as a whole is the main goal of this B-Debate.

B-Debate International Center for Scientific Debate Barcelona is an initiative promoted by Biocat and the "la Caixa" Foundation in order to seek out answers and solutions to social challenges and needs in the life sciences arena by holding top-notch international scientific debates.

The **scientific director** of this debate, entitled "***Impact of Ageing on Mental Health and Well-being***" is Dr. Josep Maria Haro, director of the R&D Unit at the Saint John of God Private Foundation for Research.

Noteworthy participants in this B-Debate include: (Possibly available for interviews at the lunch or coffee breaks).

Dr. Josep Maria Haro: Scientific leader of this B-Debate. Dr. Haro, psychiatrist and PhD in public health, is the director of Teaching, Research and Innovation at Parc Sanitari Sant Joan de Déu. After studying medicine, he went on to train in Epidemiology and Public Health at the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health (Baltimore, MD, USA). He later specialized in psychiatry at Hospital Clínic Barcelona. For the past fifteen years he has worked in both healthcare and public health research and has published more than one hundred scientific articles.

Dr. José Luis Ayuso: Professor of psychiatry at the Autonomous University of Madrid and practices medicine at Hospital Universitario de La Princesa. Dr. Ayuso is the director of the Affective Disorders Multidisciplinary Research Team and head researcher on many projects. Director of the WHO Collaborating Center for Mental Health Services Research and Training.

Dr. Yaakov Stern: Dr. Stern is a professor of Clinical Neuropsychology in the Department of Neurology, Psychiatry, and Psychology, at the Sergievsky Center and at the Taub Institute for Research of Alzheimer's Disease and the Ageing Brain, University of Columbia Association of Physicians and Surgeons. Dr. Stern is director of the Cognitive Neuroscience Division and director of Clinical Neuropsychology of Memory Disorders at the New York State Psychiatric Institute.

Dr. Hal Kendig: Dr. Kendig is a sociologist and gerontologist who served as professor of Ageing and Population Health and as the head of Ageing, Health and Work Research Unit at the University of Sydney. He previously was national convenor of the ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well, dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Sydney, director of the ARC Key Center in Gerontology at La Trobe University, and senior fellow in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University.

Dr. Carol Brayne: Dr. Carol Brayne is a professor of Public Health and Medicine in the University of Cambridge Department of Public Health and Primary Care. Dr. Brayne is an epidemiologist and public health physician. Her research focuses on dementia, healthy ageing and neuropsychiatric epidemiology, among other areas. She is the director of the Institute of Public Health at the University of Cambridge.

Structure of the debates

The first session, on Wednesday 29, will focus on epidemiology among the ageing population, mental health among the elderly, and ageing and wellbeing.

On **Thursday 30**, participants will debate topics including healthy ageing, the implications for mental health policy and social aspects of ageing.

The full program of the **B-Debate “Impact of Ageing on Mental Health and Well-being”** is available on the following link:

http://www.bdebate.org/sites/default/files/archivos/debate/bdebate_fsjd_mentalhealth_program.pdf

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR INTERVIEWS:

Marc Portella and Zuberoa Marcos

Press Office. B-Debate

T. +34 650 259 013 (Marc) and +34 686 575 178 (Zuberoa)

premsa@bdebate.org www.bdebate.org @BDebate

Irene Roch

Communication Department. "la Caixa" Foundation

Irene Roch: 93 404 60 27 / 669 457 094 / iroch@fundaciolacaixa.es