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Living to 100 International Research Symposium— Something for Everyone

By Jean-Marc Fix

Reinsurance sometimes feels more like an art than a science, so when a chance to understand in depth a key segment of the market appears, it should be seized. The Living to 100 Symposium is such a chance and I hope you seized it. If not, do not despair: you will have another chance ... in three years.

The January 2011 symposium, cosponsored by the Reinsurance Section, was the fourth in the series born of the vision of Bob Johansen. A unique characteristic of the symposium is that it seeks ideas from other disciplines on aging issues. Although it is not your typical actuarial symposium, there is much understanding to be gained from listening to papers outside our profession. Demographers, sociologists, gerontologists and biologists all approach differently one of the issues that is also central to actuaries: surviving and dying at the older ages.

The symposium is made of a mixture of panel discussions and papers. Generally the panels address implications of aging for our business (like the comparison of annuity mortality for different countries) and for society at large (like the future need for doctors and nurses). The papers, generally presented in groups of three, can vary from extremely technical to being very approachable. As a matter of fact, the symposium has been built to have two implicit tracks: one track being more technical while the second track is more focused on consequences and generally is less technical. There is always something for everyone.

The paper presentations are critically reviewed and tied together by the comments of a discussant. For those of you not used to more academic symposiums, the debate following the presentations is more heated than what we are used to seeing at a typical actuarial meeting—and may be worth the price of admission alone! We are talking about the edge of what is known, and life on this frontier is exciting even if it is only a frontier of knowledge. A life's worth of work often has been invested by the researchers presenting their papers.

The topics that were probably the most interesting to readers of *Reinsurance News* revolved around future shapes of the mortality curves and trends, mortality modeling, and finally aging and healthy aging predictors. Other sessions that may have been of interest focused on long-term care, and on a personal level for all of us, pension and retirement issues.

For the technically inclined, there was another look at the Lee-Carter model that evaluated measures of robustness and drift¹. For the risk factor hunter among us, much can be gained in looking not only at the traditional factors (like obesity—less impact than you may think—on mortality,² but also at some non traditional factors (nature or nurture) and an intriguing approach to evaluating that dilemma.³

Nothing is more dangerous than what we know except what we don't know we don't know. The question of the leveling of the "ultimate" mortality at very advanced age, which most practitioners believe is actually happening, could be a data construct artifact as some researchers suggest.⁴

Finally, if, when reading this you realized you missed a great opportunity—and you may well have—it is



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never too late to get the monographs from this and all of the other Living to 100 symposiums from the **Life Monographs** section of the **Monographs** page of the **News and Publications** tab on the SOA website. They can be found at <http://livingto100.soa.org/monographs.aspx>

Jean-Marc Fix is a member both of the Research Council of the Reinsurance Section and the organizing committee of the Living to 100-2011 symposium. He also was the discussant of the Slowing the Aging Process session at the symposium. ■

¹ X. Liu and H. Yu, Assessing and Extending the Lee-Carter Model for Long Term Prediction

² E. Stallard, The Impact of Obesity and Diabetes on LTC Disability and Mortality

³ V. Jarry, R. Bourbeau, and A. Gagnon, Predisposition for longevity: Survival of Siblings and Spouses of Centenarians in Québec

⁴ N. Gavrilova & L. Gavrilov, Mortality Measurement and Modeling Beyond Age 100