What is the “Healthy Life Simulation”?

Simulations have been used by the military and large businesses for many decades to try and foresee what might happen in the future. The evidence around doing a particular thing (for instance the effect of giving up smoking on health, or the impact on profitability of a business dropping the price of a product) is quite often clear but how people/organisations react is much less clear. Experimenting with change in real life is potentially very expensive, risky and can take a long time for the consequences to become clear. Simulations are all about experimenting with how people react to particular things, and then predicting what the consequences are, based on the best evidence.

The NE of England like other areas has significant variation in how well people age depending on where they live. Government data shows the number of healthy years a 55 year old can expect to live will vary by 11 years by living just a few stops apart on the Metro line. We know what can change this, but success depends on making this work at a very local level. The ‘Healthy Life Simulation’ will explore different ways of addressing this. What we do know is that we need to radically change the status quo if we are to avoid the huge social and economic burden of large numbers ageing badly, but what does radical look like, and will it work?

Can we fix this in 1½ days?

No, clearly not! However, we can explore many possibilities and test reactions which will help us understand what we can do better. The simulation will help us to narrow down possibilities significantly without spending lots of time and money. This particular event will provide some unique learning, but is just part of better understanding how we can help our families, friends and communities age better and live happier, healthier lives.

The University has lots of experts in this, why do you need me?

It’s true the University has many experts (and a number will be present on the day), however it’s crucial that people, like yourself, from a variety of communities tell us how you would respond, make your own suggestions and tell us if you don’t believe our evidence so that the simulation is as close to the real world as possible and allows us all to learn.

Why on earth do you need me for 1½ days?

We need time to explore people’s responses and how we might react, listen to what people have to say, and work through what that might mean – then come back with new ideas. As we explore ideas, everyone needs time to think and reflect.

What will I do?

We will have a wide range of people who will each give their views. This will include opportunities to vote anonymously, ask questions and offer advice in open sessions, and listen to and interact with two competing teams. You will be supported throughout the simulation and have a chance to hear from and speak to local, national and international experts, along with local and national media. There will also be
time to discuss and take breaks. You will have the opportunity to explore what your personal ageing process might look like, through our Livewell personalised advice system which you can have a peek at on the day (it’s not available to the public quite yet).

**What support will I get at the event?**

We plan to have plenty of people on hand to make sure that everyone’s opinion is heard and everyone feels comfortable being able to express their views. There will be an atmosphere of mutual respect at the simulation, even when we disagree, and it’s important to remember that this is an exercise to help us reflect the real world so there are no wrong answers. We hope to be able to encourage healthy debate and benefit from listening to a wide range of people working together for a common goal. We will wear badges showing our first name and where we are from at the simulation.

**Isn’t this just an expensive one-off?**

No, this is just the launch of a simulation and learning process which has been worked on by experts for several years. The simulation can and will be used many times, by experts, communities, schools etc. As new evidence becomes available the simulation will be modified and new understanding gained. This is an opportunity for a wide range of people to explore radical ideas in a safe environment.

**Can anyone come?**

No. You have been chosen specifically because we want to involve a wide range of people with a variety of interests and backgrounds. We hope that with your input we can show that the gap in healthy life expectancy can be reduced. We understand that there will be people disappointed not to be involved but there are plans to run future simulations, so it’s always worth applying. Please bear in mind that spaces at the simulation are extremely limited and, once confirmed, your place will be reserved for you, so if you don’t come we cannot offer your place to someone else who would have liked to attend.

**What preparation do I need to do?**

None, you will be fully briefed on your role (whatever that is) when you arrive, you just need to bring yourself. You don’t need to be computer or technology literate, our facilities are fully accessible and there will be people around to help you in any way you might reasonably need.

**Practical matters**

This launch simulation will take place at the Research Beehive at Newcastle University on Friday 27th September (9am – 5pm) and Saturday 28th September 2013 (9am – 2pm). Food and drink will be provided throughout the day. Smoking is not permitted on the University premises. Reasonable travel expenses are reimbursable against receipts. We can send you a map and any other information you require prior to the event.

**Where can I find out more?**

E-mail changingage@ncl.ac.uk with your query.