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INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

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NEDERLANDSE
EDITIE



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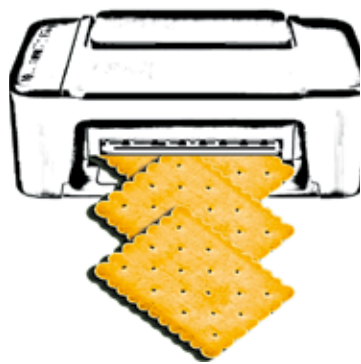


SPLINTERS

A funny incident, a striking piece of news, something interesting that happened elsewhere in the country: it is in this column.

Inedible biscuits

He spent his PhD track making biscuits, but couldn't eat a single one. Mechanical engineer Nicky Jonkers, from TU Eind-



hoven researched which structures you could apply to food using a 3D printer. To do so, he made use of a so-called powder-based printer, writes university newspaper *Cursor* in Eindhoven. It stacks layers of powder on top of each other and then sticks them together using laser. Jonkers wanted to know what various printer settings did with density – and with that the structure and texture – of the biscuit. The handiest way to test this, is by eating it, but that was impossible. The powders were, to be true, edible, but the printer is also used for pharmaceutical applications and you don't want residue from that going into your body. So he tested his baking products in the lab by taking X-rays and using a machine with two plates that imitated biting movements. Now there is a model for digital biscuits, but, says Jonkers, only a real person's mouth can determine what the new structures do with the eating experience. Why not just stick to the oven and cooker? "Some people can only eat blended food, because they have trouble chewing. Take a hard carrot: if you could print them with a softer structure, people can still have the idea that they are eating a real meal. Otherwise, you can only give them pureed food."

Campus delivery



No time in between all those tutorial groups or meetings to go to the university cafeteria to buy yourself a roll? Or despite a rumbling stomach, you don't want to leave the library or your work space? For employees and students of Tilburg University that is no longer a reason to skip lunch. Esplanade, the restaurant on the campus grounds, has started a proper delivery service, as reported by sister newspaper *Univers*. Wearing bright coloured jackets, the employees race across the campus on electric scooters to provide hungry members of staff and students with a roll, salad or wrap at the desired time. Except during lunchtime itself, because then it is too busy in the restaurant. Nevertheless, manager Bram Veenstra is hopeful that the free service will be a success, he says in *Univers*. "We have had really positive reactions."

Taking your dog along to uni



During Covid, many dogs had the continuous company of their owners

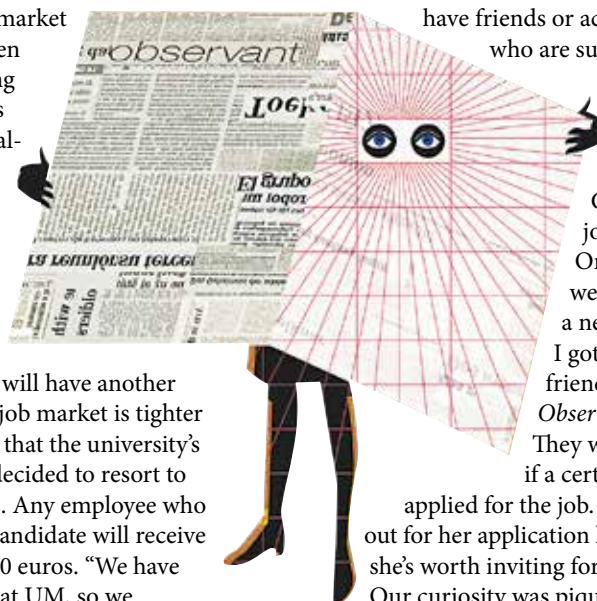
who worked from home, but these days man's best friend regularly spends whole days home alone. That thought gave an employee of the Radboud University in Nijmegen the idea of having a dog creche on campus, university newspaper *Vox* reports. After all, there is already a creche for children, why can't the dog come to work too? Not only can the four-footed animals keep each other company, but owners

can take them out for a walk during their lunchbreak, was the employee's argument. Besides, students could also come by. "Stroking a dog lowers stress levels." Whether the creche will actually come about, is still unsure. For this to happen, interest would have to be assessed. According to the employee, dog owners and students reacted positively to the proposal.

No referral bonus

We were treated to a slice of pie at our editorial meeting this week. Our junior editor DV had brought strawberry *vlaai* to celebrate the fact that he will soon be dropping the word "junior" from his title. From the end of June, he'll be able to call himself an editor. Well done! DV had emerged as the best candidate during last year's recruitment process. If I remember correctly, we'd received about fifteen applications. Not a lot, no, but we're used to it by now.

Even though the job market for journalists has been poor for years, moving to South Limburg has turned out to be a deal-breaker for many. Maastricht and its environs are great for a weekend, people will say, but actually living there? No thank you. I fear the day that we will have another vacancy, because the job market is tighter than ever. It's so tight that the university's HR department has decided to resort to unorthodox methods. Any employee who successfully refers a candidate will receive a referral bonus of 500 euros. "We have 5000 employees here at UM, so we have an extensive network. Surely people



have friends or acquaintances who are suitable for jobs at UM", explained HR director Nieke Guillory to our journalist WD. One time, we were looking for a new editor when I got a call from a friend and former *Observant* colleague. They wanted to know if a certain person had applied for the job. Keep an eye out for her application letter, they said; she's worth inviting for an interview. Our curiosity was piqued. The letter was good and the interview went even

letter from the editor

better. We ended up hiring her, a young and highly competent journalist who was a good fit for the team. Moving to South Limburg was not a problem for her. By now, she has been at the helm of *Psychologie Magazine* for years, and she, in turn, recommended a candidate to us for another vacancy. Yet another successful referral. I like receiving referrals for job openings. They always come from people who know *Observant*, how things work around here and what we expect from our colleagues. But we've never rewarded them with a bonus before. Come to think of it, I'm not even sure we rewarded them with a bottle of wine. We'll have to do better next time.

Riki Janssen

Every week, the editor-in-chief writes about what has been happening at the *Observant* office

Shortage on the labour market

500 euro for anyone who recruits a new colleague

Maastricht University uses its own personnel as recruiter. Employees can earn 500 euro if they bring in a new colleague.

According to HR director Nieke Guillory, the greatest challenges are in finding support staff (OBP). “Financial, legal, IT and even in higher positions such as director or assistant director.” We are getting few applications “and when we get plenty of letters, it doesn’t appear easy to find the right candidate”.

At the moment, there are almost thirty ‘non-academic’ internal and external vacancies on

Academic Transfer. A third of those are in the IT field. Guillory: “The number of vacancies in itself doesn’t say much. It is a snapshot. You don’t, for example, see how many are being posted for the second and third time, so how long the search for a candidate has been going on. But thirty to forty vacancies per month for administrative and support staff is more than in previous years.”

In addition, Guillory has noticed that it has become more difficult in certain scientific disciplines. As an example, she mentions Artificial Intelligence.

“There are 5,000 employees at the UM which means that we have an enormous network. Someone most likely has a friend or acquaintance who is suitable for a position at the UM.” And no, there doesn’t necessarily need to be a vacancy. If you have someone in mind, you can introduce him or her to the HR advisor of the faculty or service, or to your manager, she says. In that sense HR wants to involve staff members more in the recruitment process. “It is not just a task for those in charge.”

Does the location of Maastricht, in the extreme south of the Netherlands, play a role in the

shortage? “That is possible, but it differs greatly per position.”

The bonus is 500 euro (gross) for every successful candidate that you put forward, is what it says in the communication e-mail that was sent last week. Plus, an “incentive” for the team, also at a value of 500 euro. There are conditions, because that friend or acquaintance must of course actually come and work here and get through the probationary period.

Wendy Degens

Executive Board: “Enforcement and bringing attention to the smoking policy”

Smokers at the UM causing inconvenience

From August 2020, one can no longer smoke on educational premises in the Netherlands. Still, the rules are not completely clear to everyone, it appeared in Randwyck last week. The Executive Board acknowledges that there is inconvenience and is planning to take action.

If you pull tape around the campus in Randwyck, including the green areas, you would have marked off the entire smoke-free zone. Smokers have to walk quite a way to puff on a cigarette. Practically nobody does this, as appeared from just one hour’s surveillance around UNS50. Smoking students, employees, and a few ‘white coats’: everyone is guilty of it. Their butts end up on the ground or are crushed on the large red bins. There is not a smoker to be seen just outside the limits of the UM grounds this Monday afternoon.

Rebelliousness? Laziness? Indifference? Or ignorance? It is at any rate not because of the signposting; on all the UM grounds, there are multiple signs with the text ‘These grounds are smoke-free’. Also in English.

At the faculties in the city centre, it seems that people are more inclined to adhere to the smoking ban. The limits of the educational premises are clearer. However, that is where there is a real cigarette butt problem. Because smoking is no longer permitted, the UM has removed all ashtrays from the university grounds. One glance at the footpath and street near the gates to FASoS, SBE and the Faculty of Law makes it clear where the butts are ending up. “It is bad for the environment and for the image of the university,” members of various



Photo: Observant

faculty councils commented at the beginning of April. There were suggestions for solutions, such as fines of one euro and making sure the area is cleaned. Or addressing those involved directly, dean of law Jan Smits recommended. But as yet, this doesn’t seem to have yielded any results.

The Executive Board admits in a written reaction that because of Covid they have hardly supervised at all. Now that students and

employees are returning to the university, it is “becoming visible that the inconvenience on and outside the UM premises is increasing” and that measures will have to be taken. The building managers will have to enforce compliance of the smoking regulations. The occupational health and safety service, together with Marketing and Communication, will “bring the smoking policy to everyone’s attention again”. Attention will also be drawn to the

‘Quit Smoking’ course that the UM offers. And what about the cigarette butts? These will be cleared away every other week by the UM’s maintenance service, even if they are on municipal grounds around the university buildings. “This applies to the locations where people smoke most, such as Universiteitssingel 50 and Tongersestraat 53”, said the Executive Board.

YM

Over the Rainbow (-washing)

Finally, it is June, summer, sunshine, and Pride Month. Also known as that time of the year when companies suddenly become frontline defenders of LGBTQ+ rights. Brace yourself for pride editions of every product you could think of and cringy commercials, definitely made by straight people, that tell you that you are fabulous just the way you are, *hunty!* No one will ever love and support you as much as corporations will during Pride Month. Hold onto that feeling because it won’t last long! But what is so wrong with companies showing



their support for the LGBTQ+ community, shouldn’t we embrace this?

The problem is, that during the other 11 months of the year, companies are suspiciously quiet about their support. This phenom-

enon is called Rainbowwashing and gets more common since pride marketing is no longer the exception but the standard. Companies like Amazon and Disney claim their support for the queer community while simultaneously giving money to anti-LGBTQ+ politicians and campaigns. Other companies may use the rainbow flag to get more profit during Pride Month but don’t give any of that money back to the community. Because let’s be clear; adding a rainbow to your products is not supporting the LGBTQ+ community. Companies are profiting on marginalized identities and should therefore be responsible to disclose where this money goes to and give back to the people they are capitalizing on. A campaign is worth little to nothing if the brand does not help to create actual positive change in LGBTQ+ lives.

To be clear; corporate involvement in pride has also positive impacts, primarily in terms

of representation and visibility. Many people, especially on an international level feel seen and hopeful by big companies openly supporting their cause. Still, this support has a very limited impact if the company is not advocating for those values 365 days a year. So maybe this June we should try to be more conscious about the companies we are supporting with our money. Sure, buying stuff is fun. And do I have pride edition socks in my drawer? Yes! Do I need them? No! Do they make me happy when I wear them? Yes! But for my next purchase, I will try to pay attention to the company I am giving my money to and if they are vocal about LGBTQ+ rights outside of Pride Month.

Line-Marie Eichhorst,
first-year student at UCM

This column reflects the personal views of the author

series leadership styles

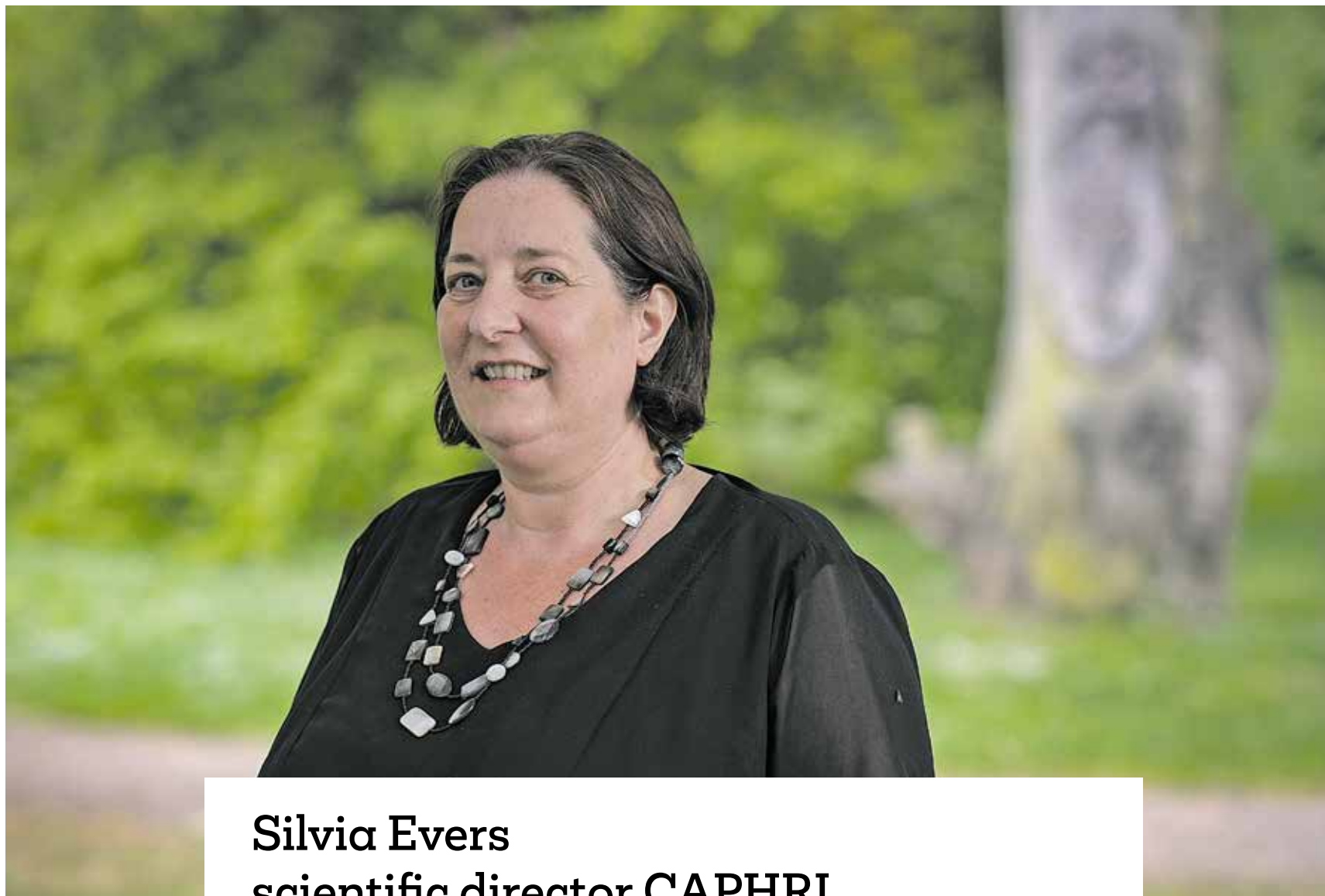


Photo: Joey Roberts

Silvia Evers scientific director CAPHRI

“I used to have
a tendency to say
‘yes, but’”

“I’m still in the honeymoon phase”, says Professor Silvia Evers with an almost apologetic laugh. She has been the scientific director of CAPHRI, one of the research schools in the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, since November 2021. The question was: what do people say about you in the workplace? Her answer: “Only positive things so far.”

CAPHRI (Care and Public Health Research Institute) consists of about 220 researchers, more than four hundred PhD students (both internal and external), and its own office with thirteen employees. It’s quite a big club, acknowledges Evers (57). She hopes that all those people will feel comfortable enough to speak up against her if necessary. “I will certainly encourage it. I would appreciate it if people were and remained critical. You learn the most from criticism, after all. It’s best at showing you where you need to improve.” Evers, who has been appointed for a term of six years (0.5 FTE), knows CAPHRI inside out. As professor of Public Health Technology Assessment – what does the treatment of a certain disease cost? What is the cost-

effectiveness of a healthy lifestyle campaign? – she led one of CAPHRI’s research programmes for years. In other words, she’s an experienced leader who is used to coaching people, developing strategic research lines and seeking collaboration with other groups. And she will continue to do so, although being in a leadership position in 2022 is not the same as it was roughly fifteen to twenty years ago. “The work that researchers and lecturers do is much more complex than it used to be. For example, lecturers today have to meet many more requirements in terms of language proficiency, having a basic teaching qualification (BKO), being able to work with a diverse student population. It requires more skills, not just from the lecturers themselves, but also from their supervisors.”

Developing policy

Evers believes in collegial leadership. During her first months as scientific director, she talked to a lot of people: the eleven heads of department involved in CAPHRI, the leaders of the six research lines, the manager of the CAPHRI office, and representatives of its PhD students and researchers. Important ques-

tions that kept coming up were: what should CAPHRI do for you? What should it *not* do? What do you expect from its scientific director? “I want to involve people in developing policy. I want to make use of their expertise and I want to check whether our policy is having the desired effect: is this what we had in mind?” Evers is putting her money where her mouth is by establishing a management team this month, as well as a science commission to provide input on the direction of CAPHRI.

Centre stage

A good boss is transparent, pays attention to their employees and facilitates them in getting the best out of themselves, says Evers. But a good boss also brings people together. “It’s very important to me that we become better at finding each other within CAPHRI. We’re a large organisation and we don’t always know what our colleagues are working on, even though we could really help each other out. As the scientific director, I also have a networking responsibility: I need to make connections with people outside the organisation. When I hear something outside our institute about a

topic that my own people are also working on, I try to connect them with each other. I see myself as the face of CAPHRI in that sense.” That doesn’t mean she always needs to be centre stage, though. “I only take centre stage when it benefits CAPHRI. I try to give others the stage, particularly those researchers who tend to stay in the background.”

Sensitivity

When asked what her strengths are, she doesn’t have to think hard about it. “I’m a good listener, I’m empathetic, I’m good at thinking on my feet and I’m creative, especially when it comes to making connections. And I think I’ve developed a sensitivity to the play of political powers within academia. I’m interested in those politics.”

FHML management course

She learnt a lot in the management course of the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, which has been around for a long time. “It’s an intensive, year-long course that teaches you a lot about yourself. I used to have a tendency to say ‘yes, but’, to think in often gloomy scenarios. Why? I think it’s because if you do that, reality will never be as bad as you expected. The course taught me to think more broadly and positively. “It also helped me rediscover the importance of informal communication. It’s simple things, like calling people before a meeting to tell them what you plan to do so it won’t take them by surprise.” The people in her cohort even became dear colleagues. “We still act as sounding boards for each other. We still keep in touch.”

Riki Janssen

This is a weekly series in which we interview people in leadership positions at UM about their leadership style. In January 2022, Maastricht University launched the Leadership Academy as part of the Recognition & Rewards programme, which aims to create more diversity in academic career paths and foster quality academic leadership.

Maastricht researchers on the dark web

For sale: Netflix login code for 2.25 dollar



Illustration: Shutterstock

Just after the cyber-attack on Maastricht University in December 2019, a group from the Faculty of Law and the department Data Science and Knowledge Engineering thought: what if we ourselves went looking for personal data belonging to our own employees and students that may have landed on the dark web? Scans of diplomas or login details, for example. Wandering around illegal market places, the team was able to make a thorough analysis of all kinds of ‘merchandise’ on offer.

On 5 February 2020, during a symposium in which the Maastricht Executive Board revealed all about the cyber-attack for which eventually almost two hundred thousand in ransom was paid, the story was: no, most likely no personal data fell into the wrong hands, but further investigations were required. “We didn’t expect that any sensitive data is going around

on shady websites, but we were not sure,” says Jerry Spanakis, assistant professor at the department of Data Science and Knowledge Engineering (DKE). He and his colleagues decided to ‘dive’ into the dark web, a part of the Internet that is not directly accessible. Weapons, drugs, pornography, counterfeit money but also personal data are sold there

illegally. And it was the latter that the team was looking for. What would the market places look like where banking data, passport details and login codes are sold? How much virtual money does this entail? Billions of euros?

Burner laptop

It was a whole new world for the Maastricht

researchers. Spanakis: “I had previously seen images of the dark web, but I myself had never gone there.” Safety was important, a solid research protocol was set up, “we would not search for ‘Maastricht University’, or make our own names known, we didn’t want to attract too much attention. We just wanted to get a good picture.” They also didn’t use their work computer, but a so-called burner laptop that in principle is being used for a single task. Spanakis: “We had just had the hack, just imagine if something were to happen again. That was certainly not the idea.”

Big Blue

With the search for data belonging to students and employees at the back of their minds, they decided to carry out “a systematic analysis” of all ‘products’ that they could view. They found no fewer than 29 thousand, on twelve different market places with names such as Big Blue, White House and Deepsea. “You can compare it to Amazon, eBay or Bol.com. People put things on offer under a pseudonym, write an ‘advertising text’ to go with it and put a price tag on it. You can find a lot: user names and passwords, quite a lot of login data for Netflix subscriptions, login data of bank accounts, credit card details, passport information.” In the paper that they wrote about the study, there are a number of examples. Seller ‘Eleven’ offers 14 thousand Netflix login data for 2.25 dollar each. What else did they find? Manuals ‘how to hack’ or ‘how can I get a free iPhone’. Seller ‘Jim’ helps you with the latter for just 5 dollars. The researchers came up with, a rather euphemistic, collective name *e-learning*.

Prison sentence

The difficult thing about the dark web market places is that from one day to another they can disappear, says Spanakis. Taken down by the police or ‘cleared’ by the initiator who feels that things are getting too hot under his feet. “During our research, two market places disappeared.” To secure their ‘study material’, the researchers took snapshots. This is done by means of scraping, a technique that allows you to scrape information from a web page and copy it to a file on your own computer. They then tried to make sense of the gigantic amount of data. How? By searching for certain keywords, such as e-mail, card, hacking, fraud, and dividing everything into categories. Next, the law experts linked it to a maximum prison sentence, in accordance with the Cybercrime Convention and Dutch law. “It provides an image of how much cybercrime there is and how this compares to the price that is being asked. It is speculated that turnover on the dark web market places amounts to billions, but we counted a total of less than 500 thousand dollars. Data is cheap.”

Trust

It was “an interesting, but limited study”, Spanakis concluded, “a kind of pilot, but a lot of follow-up research is possible. You can find reviews of sellers, just like on Bol.com and eBay, but what is that trust based on?” They also noticed that many sellers operate on various market places. “They may use a different pseudonym, but looking at the use of the language in the advertisement text, we were able to establish that it most likely concerned the same person. A PhD student is now carrying out further research into that. We also didn’t go to the discussion forums where people ask all kinds of questions. It would be interesting to see how they communicate. But we would need a separate research protocol for that, in collaboration with the police, so that you don’t do anything stupid.” Oh yes, that research into UM data on the dark web, did anything come of that? “Found nothing, at least in the places where we were.”

**100,000 euro
for Maastricht
Alzheimer's
researcher**

The brain of almost one in three seventy-year-olds shows major detrimental protein accumulations, so-called plaques. Not all of them have dementia, however. Maastricht neuropsychologist Willemijn Jansen is trying to find out why some people appear 'more resistant'. She hopes this leads to treatment that can prevent or delay dementia. An approach that differs from many other Alzheimer's research projects, which focus on the origin of this plaque. Last month, Alzheimer Nederland rewarded her work with a Young Outstanding Researcher Award, an annual talent prize for young researchers, worth 100,000 euro.

Currently, Jansen studies the more than two thousand proteins that can be found in the brain fluid of people with Alzheimer's damage. "The question is whether we will find other (levels of) proteins in 'resistant' people than in patients suffering from dementia." In doing so, she also looks into the effect of lifestyle, social behaviour and cognitive activity. Because of the prize money, she also hopes to be able to take the next step: detecting proteins in brain tissue of deceased persons, from who "we know that they didn't have dementia, but also how they lived."

Read the whole interview on www.observantonline.nl

DV

**“You can discard the idea
of a single illness with
a single solution”**



Farewell interview with Alzheimer's expert

Frans Verhey

The most important theory has been shattered and dozens of years of research have not resulted in effective medication. Has the research into Alzheimer's been a huge debacle? In the meantime, the risk of dementia has decreased by 13 per cent. Without medicine.

Text: Maurice Timmermans Photo: Joey Roberts

According to the dominant theory regarding the origin of Alzheimer's disease, the most prevalent form of dementia, a specific type of protein - amyloid - accumulating between the neurons of the brain. As a result of these so-called plaques, communication between the cells becomes distorted, and they eventually die. This is the cause of Alzheimer's. If only it was that simple. The amyloid theory, which was popular in the nineteen-nineties, has lost considerable credibility. Tens of billions were invested in research into it, but results are poor. It is still not known what the amyloid protein does exactly, professor of Geriatric Psychiatry Frans Verhey recently stated in his farewell speech. Is it the cause of the disease or just a result of another damaging process? Or, does it actually protect against the disease? Because in fact, most elderly people with plaques in the brain do not develop Alzheimer's.

Should we - looking at everything - conclude that the Alzheimer research had failed?

"No, you can't say that. Initially the theory seemed plausible, everyone believed in it, I did too. But amyloid appeared difficult to research, it is not easy to recreate in the lab. You can study it in rats, but these animals don't show signs of dementia. At one point, we managed to remove the amyloid via monthly injecti-

ons into the brain, a technical tour de force, but patients didn't benefit from it in any way."

And still the hypothesis held strong.

"The theory was too big to fail. Huge investments had been made. There were brain institutes that completely focussed on amyloid, whole careers were based on it. It then becomes increasingly difficult to write it off. Some colleagues in the country, by the way, don't appreciate that I am saying this. They still believe in the theory. It just comes down to timing, they say: you just have to intervene at the right moment when the plaques are formed, in the preliminary stages of dementia, and not when it has already accumulated. That has to do with the industry, it pays some groups handsomely to recruit patients for research."

How does your group feel about it?

"It is very nuanced. You can't say that the hypothesis is incorrect. People who are in the preliminary stages of the disease and who have amyloid in their brain, have a greater chance of developing Alzheimer's. Yet, we have become more and more critical in Maastricht and for the past five years, we have no longer participated in amyloid trials. We feel that one shouldn't put all one's eggs in one basket, also because there are other options."

Let's first talk about the medication, which was approved in the USA last summer. Almost nobody believes in it.

"As far as I am concerned that is a real debacle. The FDA approved the medicine against the advice of a scientific committee. The worst decision ever, some committee members reckoned. The medicine doesn't actually do anything. The effect is somewhere behind the decimal point, it is no good to you as a patient. It initially cost 56 thousand dollar per patient per year; after criticism, the price was halved. Insurance companies won't reimburse the cost. It is not even permitted in Europa."

In the meantime, the chances of getting dementia have dropped by 13 per cent over the past ten years, without a single medicine.

"That is because we live healthier lives now, one of the options I spoke about. Many people have stopped smoking, and take blood pressure and cholesterol into consideration. The level of education plays a role too. The higher educated not only live healthier, but also use their brains more intensively, which is proven through the number of connections between the areas of the brain. But according to some scientists, this health gain is temporary; they point to all those Coke-drinking youths with obesity."

What needs to be done now?

"We, at any rate, need to continue to encourage people to live healthily. A couple of years ago, we had the Limburg campaign, 'We zijn zelf het medicijn' (We ourselves are the medicine), together with GPs. They saw that the fear of dementia motivated people more to exercise and eat healthily. Alzheimer's affects you personally, affects who you are."

Is that a conscious strategy, instilling fear?

"That wouldn't be my preferred method. Alzheimer's, as far as I am concerned, has already been portrayed as a spectre too much. You have to see it more like an ageing illness, which you could deal with differently. Since 2018, the World Health Organisation no longer views it as an incurable, scary brain disease against which nothing can be done, but as a handicap, which deserves support, just like someone in a wheelchair."

But it is in fact an incurable, scary brain disease, isn't it?

"Originally, it comes from ageing, and yes, it leads to all kinds of complaints. But what the cause is... A colleague of mine exposed a total of five different origin mechanisms, which were totally unrelated. So, most likely Alzheimer's disease is a catch-all term for multiple 'diseases'. In dementia at a young age, for example, you see a different clinical picture. Alzheimer's is at the most a vague syndrome, in which different symptoms often come together. It was wilfully framed as a scary disease in the nineteen-seventies in order to draw attention to it."

How would you feel if you received that diagnosis?

"As a handicap. I hope that people would support me, be kind to me and try to understand me. It all sounds very soft, but that is what you need as a patient."

Are you not more afraid to get Alzheimer's than, say, heart failure?

"No, also because I see that the fear has been partly created. It is like blindness, very radical and limiting, but if it comes then it comes. And don't get me wrong, it is no joke. But to be afraid beforehand; with the right help, you can have a meaningful life for years. We are doing a lot of psychosocial research into that, all with the aim to improve the quality of life."

What have you, as a scientist, learned about this whole matter?

"Modesty. If brain research has yielded anything, then it is how much more complicated everything is. You can discard the idea of a single illness with a single solution. I am also not one for overblown slogans, such as 'Rid the World of Dementia'. We are moving forward with small steps. And no, we won't have a medicine in ten years' time. It has been predicted each decade, but it has never come true."

That sounds purposeful.

"In a recent Zoom session with a number of Alzheimer researchers in the country, I asked the question again: who still believes in a solution for Alzheimer's? Nobody raised their hands." ■