**Prospective memory in old age: A paradoxical story**

A fundamental aspect of goal-directed, intentional behavior entails the ability to plan and then to remember executing future activities, such as remembering to pass a message from school to parents, to take medication in time, or to add an attachment to an e-mail before sending it off. The interplay of cognitive abilities that constitute the process of “remembering to remember” is referred to as *prospective memory* (for overviews on different research areas see Kliegel, McDaniel & Einstein, 2008, Edited Book, Erlbaum). Prospective memory is an essential ability to meet everyday life challenges across the lifespan, constitutes a key element of developing autonomy and independence and is especially important in old age with increasing health-related prospective memory demands. Therefore, understanding mechanisms underlying prospective memory in old age has become a major effort in cognitive and developmental research. The present talk will review conceptual and empirical advances from our lab in understanding age differences and associated developmental mechanisms. The talk will focus on a pattern called 'the age- prospective memory paradox'. The paradox is that adult aging results in reliably poorer performance on laboratory-based tasks of prospective memory but substantially improved performance on prospective memory tasks carried out in real life settings. In fact, meta-analytical evidence suggests that older adults outperform younger adults in prospective memory tasks carried out in everyday life. Various mechanisms including the role of emotional salience, social relevance, stress, motivation and meta-memory have been proposed to explain these apparently conflicting results. The talk will discuss available and novel evidence which addresses some of those possible mechanisms.