

# Flying High

The Newsletter of the Occupational and Aviation Medicine Unit  
University of Otago, Wellington



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## WORDS OF WISDOM FROM DR EVIL!



Firstly, I would like to applaud Katherine for even thinking of the idea of a Newsletter! Courses like ours are different, as all of us are of not too dissimilar ages and backgrounds, and students are friends not numbers. I think this is a great way for us all to keep in touch with each other; if you have news you want to share, send it to Katherine and she will publish it in future Newsletters..

Any similarity to the Queen's Christmas Speech should be promptly dispelled (I am not a queen, this is a summary not a Nativity, and this is a letter)! However, I thought we should look back at the annus horribilis. This has been quite an amazing year: the Dubai project has started with Otago playing a strong leadership role in Middle East occupational health, and various members of the team have been engaged in diplomatic efforts to promote our courses around the

world. Dave and I have been working on Hong Kong and China, Terry and I on the USA, and Pooshan and I on India. We have been well received everywhere, even if we did not find what we expected!

This is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, we have started to confront the issue of local accreditation, and in some cases Otago will be instrumental in developing specialty recognition where none previously existed. This provides us with the opportunity to be "agents for change" in regions where occupational health, aviation medicine or retrieval specialties have not existed to promote best practice in the clinical field. It also means that our qualifications are rapidly achieving prominence as being the best available – this is what our graduates need to get the best out of their education. And finally, it's about representation – if most of the airline medical departments around the world, or occupational health centres, or air ambulance services, were populated by our graduates, then we could be said to be really making a difference!

So, spread the word... If you know anyone who should be doing our course, let us know and we will do the rest!

And 2008? An annus sublimis, with the best Residential School ever, and some exciting new developments coming your way. Watch this space!

With such an international group, Happy Christmas is no longer appropriate; however, as the year ends in many countries, enjoy time to pause and reflect.

Best wishes  
Rob

## INTRODUCING “THE GALS”

as Rob has been known to call them when they're out of earshot (and thumping range)!

There was a comment that Julie was never actually introduced to the rest of the team, she just sort of appeared, so here is an official introduction to the two ladies who are the power behind the throne...



## JULIE MYERS



Julie originally trained as a physiotherapist and then went on to complete a research Master's degree in the field of Rehabilitation. She worked as the Masters Coordinator for the Rehabilitation Teaching and Research Unit (RTRU) for three years, before taking a couple of years away from the University to spend a bit more time with her children and do some contract-based research. Rob tempted Julie back to work for the University in late 2005, and while she officially works three days a week, she is often found logging on and dealing with work matters on her days off. When she escapes the office she enjoys playing golf and spending time with her husband and two teenage sons.

## KATHERINE HARRIS

With Maureen easing into retirement (she is now working three days a week with undergraduate medical students) Rob cast his eye about and poached another member of the RTRU—Katherine had been their Programme Administrator for the past four years and has worked in a tertiary environment for the 13 years prior to that, at the Wellington College of Education

and Victoria University of Wellington. Before that she ran her own business in Australia. Now that her two children are grown up and independent, when she's not working she likes nothing more than to travel to far flung corners of the world and have adventures which often seem to involve dangerous animals. In fact a colleague was once heard to comment “you know, I'm always rather surprised when you come back from your trips—alive!”



## VISITORS TO WELLINGTON

We've been lucky to host several staff in Wellington over the past month. Rob was foolish enough to leave town when Jill, Terry and Michael flew in for the ISAS Conference (more about that later). As can be seen from the photos (taken in the boss's office) it was impossible for either Julie or Katherine to control them! However we gave the departmental P-Card a good thrashing and enjoyed getting to know them better in the restaurants of Newtown. Michael was also here to talk to people about the research

methods paper, AVMX785, which we are introducing next year, and Terry took time to travel around New Zealand and other places en-route to renew and make new contacts for the University.

We took the opportunity of a visit from Mike Grocott and Monty Mythen from UCL and Ian Millar from the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne to get together while Terry was still here to discuss options for sharing in the delivery of a paper on extreme environmental medicine.

At the end of November Michele was here for a flying visit from Hong Kong, so we spent time discussing the Masters programme—and went out for a Christmas dinner with as many of the New Zealand staff as we could get together!





## UPDATE ON THE MASTERS PROGRAMME

Julie Myers

Life on the Masters front seems as busy as ever. Assuming favourable final semester results we expect to see eleven graduates for the MAvMed degree from 2007 and one from the MHealSc(Aviation Medicine). Over the past couple of months we seem to have been particularly busy fielding enquiries from prospective students interested in undertaking a Masters degree at some stage.

While many of the enquiries are for the straightforward coursework MAvMed degree, there is also a high degree of interest in the research based degrees endorsed in Occupational Medicine in particular. The Middle East seems ripe for Occupational Medicine research development so lets hope we can channel some of that into completed Masters degrees down the line.

Rob and Julie have just spent some time discussing the issues for the Masters programme in 2008 and beyond. We have also started developing an initial outline of how we will address those issues. The coursework MAvMed is relatively easy to oversee once the initial course advice and course admission issues are dealt with, although with a somewhat inflexible admissions board (the Faculty of Medicine) it is actually vital that we get this phase right, so students end up with the qualifications they require.

The issues for research based Masters degrees are varied. We are looking at strategies to facilitate that move from coursework to the research phase of the degree. In particular the difficulties associated with student research and the virtual world in which we usually teach, study and supervise. One factor we think will really help here is the introduction of our new in house research methods paper (AVMX 785) to be taught by Michael Haney. This means that instead of losing touch with students when they go off to do their research methods training we will still be right there providing the training and having input into the research proposal they are developing. There is plenty more work to be done around this issue, including looking at the department perhaps developing some projects that could be undertaken by students; perhaps looking at the way we supervise; a more hands on approach from me; and some regular contact between students starting at the Dubai residential school and carried on via audioconference, forum and diary page type activity.

The other big development aside from introducing our own research methods paper is that there is a significant change ahead (we hope) with the introduction of a 'coursework' version of the MHealSc. It will be endorsed in AeroRT, OccMed or AvMed and it is already clear that this form of the Masters degree will suit many of our clinicians - who need to become proficient consumers of evidence and research, but not necessarily have a research component to their career. This pathway to Masters will involve six papers plus a research methods paper and a small research project worth 30 points (supervised and assessed in house). For students requiring more research - for example those hoping to progress on to a PhD - the thesis option will still be available in its present form.

The uncertainty around the taught option for the MHealSc has certainly presented many course advice challenges but in the main I think we are getting the information across to students in a reasonably coherent fashion. That is enough from the Masters corner for now I think, but please feel free to direct any course advice or enquiries in my direction if you are unsure of anything. I don't always know the answer but I have great contacts for finding out!



Why you shouldn't get out of your plane in Africa...



## ISAS CONFERENCE

The ISAS Conference was held at Te Papa in Wellington on 2—3 November and we were well represented.



Terry was a keynote speaker talking about Inter-service Coordination as well as a presentation on Crew Resource Management and participating in a panel discussion. Jill gave the inaugural Kaye Melmeth Oration on Aeromedical Crew Education, in which she gave Otago a good plug, and Michael gave a presentation on the Civilian Role in Mass Casualty. All three were very well received, and were available to talk to current and future students at the exhibition stand which helped generate interest in the programme we offered. Feedback from another university programme lecturer was

that “Otago certainly has an impressive teaching team”. It was great to meet up with many of our students who were there—three of whom had to duck out to sit their exam! The conference ended with a dinner with entertainment provided by well known (in New Zealand!) entertainer, and New Zealand Idol judge, Frankie Stevens. Certain staff members showed hidden talents on the dance floor...

## FLYING BLIND

The cabin door opens. Two men dressed in pilots' uniforms walk up the aisle. Both are wearing dark glasses; one is using a guide dog and the other is tapping his way along the aisle with a cane. Nervous laughter spreads through the cabin, but the men enter the cockpit, the door closes, and the engines start up. The passengers begin glancing nervously around, searching for some sign that this is just a little practical joke. None is forthcoming. The plane moves faster and faster down the runway, and the people sitting in the window seats realize they're headed straight for the water at the edge of the airport.

As it begins to look as though the plane will plough into the water, panicked screams fill the cabin. At that moment, the plane lifts smoothly into the air. The passengers relax and laugh a little sheepishly, and soon all retreat into their magazines, secure in the knowledge that the plane is in good hands.

And in the cockpit, one of the blind pilots turns to the other and says, "You know, Bob, one of these days they're gonna scream too late and we're all gonna die."



**WISHING YOU ALL A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM SANTA AND HIS HELPERS!!**