

# Webster Centre for Infectious Diseases

Newsletter: Issue 1, November 2008

University of Otago, Dunedin, NZ

## *A Message from the Director:*



Professor Kurt Krause  
Webster Centre Director

Hello and welcome to the inaugural edition of the Webster Centre for Infectious Diseases newsletter. After a period of relative quiet, the Centre has been getting busy as summer approaches. In this issue, you will read about our new Assistant to the Director, Rebecca Psutka, who has been pouring her energy and enthusiasm into the Centre since she joined us. We are announcing the recipients of the first two Student Summer Scholarships and we are searching for the best candidate for the first Postgraduate Travel Scholarship. On the second page of the newsletter you will read about two recent infectious diseases meetings held in New Zealand as chronicled by the meeting conveners. Finally page one, includes a profile of a Webster Centre Featured Researcher: Assoc Prof Iain Lamont. Have a great read, send us some feedback and start thinking about coming to Dunedin next term to attend the second New Zealand wide Webster Centre for Infectious Diseases research meeting.

## Webster Centre Announces Upcoming Student Opportunities

### *Undergraduate Student Summer Research Scholarship*

Congratulations to **Emma Scaletti** and **Sarah James** who have been awarded Webster Centre Studentships for this summer!

Emma and Sarah have both completed their third year of study at the University of Otago and will be working in Kurt Krause's and Warren Tate's laboratories, respectively.

### *Postgraduate Student Travel Scholarship*

If you are a postgraduate student who has some data they would like to present orally or in poster format at an international conference you should apply for this travel scholarship for up to \$5000 in funding! Applications close **21 November**.

Please contact [rebecca.psutka@otago.ac.nz](mailto:rebecca.psutka@otago.ac.nz) for more information on how to apply.

## Webster Centre Featured Researcher: Assoc Prof Iain Lamont



Assoc Prof Iain Lamont  
University of Otago

Associate Professor Iain Lamont studies iron uptake and pathogenicity of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* at the University of Otago. Iain is internationally known for his studies involving the role of iron uptake in controlling bacterial signaling of gene expression, and thus pathogenicity. His work has been published in many prestigious journals including *PNAS*, *Molecular Microbiology*, and *Infection and Immunity*.

Iain was initially fascinated by science and chose to study *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* when he came to the University of Otago as a researcher. "*Pseudomonas* is medically relevant due to the infections it causes, especially in cystic fibrosis patients, burn victims and immunocompromised individuals", he explains.

Conveniently, *P. aeruginosa* is also relatively practical for postgrad study and is not a highly risky organism; classified as biocontainment level 2. When asked what the most rewarding aspect of infectious disease research is, Iain immediately replies, "working towards goals that may make a difference for patients and contributing to the body of knowledge about infectious diseases".

Training future infectious disease researchers is also a very positive experience for him. In terms of advice to postgrad students or post-doctoral fellows, Iain recommends "think hard about what you want". He also emphasizes that scientists should aim to broaden their experiences and should try to avoid getting stuck in a narrow field as so many transferable skills are acquired during a PhD or post-doc.

## Recent Events in New Zealand Infectious Disease Research:

### University of Otago Virology Theme holds the 5th Meeting in Dunedin



Prof Campo



Dr. Tschärke

The Virology Theme held the 5th Virology Theme Meeting in Dunedin on the 6th and 7th November 2008. This meeting brought together Virologists from throughout New Zealand to share their research. Two keynote speakers contributed to the programme, **Prof Saveria Campo**, Institute of Comparative Medicine, University of Glasgow, who has expertise in human papillomavirus and the host immune response and **Dr. David Tschärke**, School of Biochemistry and

Biology, Australian National University, whose field of interest is T cell recognition of vaccinia virus. The theme of the meeting, 'Sixty years of Virology Research at Otago' was highlighted at the conference dinner, with guest speakers Dr Terry Maguire and Associate Professor James Kalmakoff. The Virology Theme gratefully thanks the Webster Centre for Infectious Diseases for supporting Keynote speaker travel.

Contributed by **Dr. Marilyn Hibma**

### TB meeting in Wellington emphasizes NZ's role in global TB research



Dr. Ronan O'Toole  
Victoria University of Wellington

In October this year, over 35 researchers and clinicians from New Zealand universities, health authorities and crown research institutes met at the Malaghan Institute of Medical Research, Victoria University of Wellington, to discuss the prevalence of tuberculosis and the strategies required to combat the disease at the local and international levels.

With current vaccines having only limited effectiveness and the emergence of drug-resistant strains, new research is needed to develop better tools to control the disease", says Dr O'Toole.



Dr. Joanna Kirman  
Malaghan Institute of Medical Research

"The theme of the meeting was New Zealand's role in international research to reduce the burden of tuberculosis", says Dr. Ronan O'Toole, organiser of the meeting and Senior Lecturer in Microbiology at Victoria University. "Worldwide, approximately 1.7 million people die from tuberculosis each year.

"New Zealand scientists conduct a diverse array of TB research to address the many problems we face", says Dr Joanna Kirman, Head of the Malaghan Institute Infectious Diseases Group and co-organiser of the meeting. "The meeting facilitated the sharing of resources and knowledge between research groups, which we hope will accelerate our progress towards new ways to prevent and treat this insidious disease", says Dr Kirman.

Contributed by **Dr. Ronan O'Toole**

### Webster Centre welcomes new Assistant



Rebecca Psutka,  
Assistant to the Director  
Webster Centre for  
Infectious Diseases

In early October the Webster Centre for Infectious Diseases welcomed Rebecca Psutka to the team. Rebecca Psutka hails from northern Canada, where she completed the majority of her tertiary education at the University of Alberta earning a BSc(Hons) in Immunology and Infection. In terms of academics, her interests include improving public health through infectious disease prevention and control measures. Outside of the lab and

Office, Rebecca enjoys outdoor sports, singing in choirs, Tim Tams and going to the beach! In addition to providing the Webster Centre with administrative and scientific support, Rebecca has taken a position in the Krause lab as an Assistant Research Fellow. If you have any questions or comments for the Webster Centre, email [rebecca.psutka@otago.ac.nz](mailto:rebecca.psutka@otago.ac.nz) or drop by and see her if you are in Dunedin, room 107a, Biochemistry Building.

The Webster Centre for Infectious Diseases can be contacted at:

107 Biochemistry Bldg  
University of Otago,  
Dunedin, New Zealand  
Email: [kurt.krause@otago.ac.nz](mailto:kurt.krause@otago.ac.nz)

