

Newsletter: Issue 6, April/May 2009

University of Otago, Dunedin, NZ

A Message from the Director:



Professor Kurt Krause
Webster Centre Director

Hello and welcome to the April/May edition of the Webster Centre newsletter. We had a wonderful symposium last month and I wanted to thank each of you for your support and to thank Rebecca Psutka for all her hard work in organizing the event. Everything went off without a hitch in large part due to her assiduousness. At the meeting I mentioned that the Webster Centre is aiming to foster the formation of multi-disciplinary research networks focusing on specific research themes, such as “mycobacterial diseases” or “MRSA” and to feature these networks on our website. By forming and featuring these networks we can increase the public profile of infectious disease research in New Zealand and work towards increasing public awareness and eventually research support for funding in these areas. If you are member of such a group or would like to help put one together, please contact us by emailing: webstercentre@otago.ac.nz

Webster Centre for Infectious Diseases Symposium 2009!



Drs. John Hennessey, Jo White and Clifton E. Barry at Otago.



Symposium audience



Prof Tate gives his presentation



Prof Tagg presents on Friday



A/Prof Michael Baker

The Webster Centre for Infectious Diseases held its second biennial Symposium in Dunedin April 23-24. The Symposium was well attended with participation of more than 80 infectious diseases researchers from at least ten institutions throughout New Zealand. Two main themes were discussed in this years conference: mycobacterial diseases and vaccine discovery and development.

Vice-Chancellor David Skegg opened the Symposium with commentary on the relevance of infectious diseases to human health. The meeting included talks on varied aspects of infectious diseases research ranging from chemistry and biochemistry to microbiology, immunology, genetics, and public health. Illustrative of the broad range of topics presented, the first talk was given by Professor Warren Tate, on the biochemistry of frame shifting in proteins. This was followed later by Dr. Sue Huang from ESR at the National Centre for Biosecurity and Infectious Diseases spoke of influenza surveillance. Dr. Ronan O'Toole from Victoria spoke on screening for antimycobacterial compounds, while Professor Frank Griffin, Microbiology and Immunology, University of Otago discussed the genetics of disease susceptibility in deer. Dr. Stephen Chambers from University of Otago, Christchurch addressed the use of gas chromatography in infectious diseases diagnosis. Public health related infectious diseases research was well covered by talks from Professor Philip Hill, Director for the Centre for International Health, University of Otago and Dr. Michael Baker from Otago, Wellington.

The Symposium had two international keynote speakers, both from the United States. Clifton E. Barry, III, PhD the Chief of the Tuberculosis Research Section at the National Institute of Health spoke on tuberculosis related research and C. Jo White, M.D., Chief Medical Officer of VGX Pharmaceuticals, spoke on key steps required to license a vaccine for patient delivery. Her talk is available on the Webster Centre website at

<http://www.webstercentre.otago.ac.nz/webstercentremeeeting.html>

Webster Centre profiled researchers – student awards from Symposium



Emma Summers – Best Poster



Mridula Dogra – Best Presentation

At the 2009 Webster Centre Symposium two students received awards for Best Student Oral Presentation and Best Student Poster Presentation. Webster Centre Steering Committee members Professor Warren Tate, Professor Philip Hill and Associate Professor Russell Poulter formed the award committees and agreed on the recipients.

The Best Student Oral Presentation award went to **Mridula Dogra**, a third year PhD student from the University of Auckland working with Dr. Nuala Helsby. Mridula's PhD work focuses on studying the metabolism of a novel anti-tuberculosis drug, PA-824, which is currently in Phase II clinical trials. Her project involves identifying the metabolites of this drug and elucidating the various metabolic pathways by which these metabolites are formed. It is hoped that the information gained from her research will help in the development of

second-generation analogues of PA-824 with improved biological properties. Mridula hopes to continue researching in the area of drug metabolism.

The Best Student Poster Presentation award went to **Emma Summers**, who is a first year PhD student at the University of Waikato under the supervision of Associate Professor Vic Arcus. Her research is focused on the biochemistry and structure of Lsr2, a protein from *M. tuberculosis*. Because Lsr2 has potential to regulate genes associated with inducible multi-drug tolerance and protect DNA from oxidative stress, it is a focus for research into possible mechanisms of action of anti-mycobacterial antibiotics. In the future, Emma would like to continue researching in the field of infectious diseases.

Webster Centre Researchers in the Media



Lack of resources in Tb fight decried

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By John Gibb on Mon, 27 Apr 2009
News: Dunedin | Health

The reality that some internationally-agreed goals for fighting tuberculosis will not be achieved by 2015 is a "pretty damning indictment" of the insufficient resources made available, a leading American researcher, Dr Clifton Barry, says.

Among the Kyoto Millennium Goals was a bid to halve the number of people in Africa with tuberculosis by 2015.

With the 2009 Webster Centre Symposium and the recent Influenza A H1N1 outbreak Webster Centre researchers have given their perspectives on infectious disease research an outbreaks to the media.

On the Webster Centre website, www.webstercentre.otago.ac.nz we have a list of media events.

Notably, Professor Kurt Krause appeared on TVNZ's Breakfast television for an interview with Paul Henry to discuss the recent outbreak and the use of Tamiflu as a

treatment for seasonal and epidemic influenza.

ESR's Dr. Sue Huang and Christchurch School of Medicine's Lance Jennings, and Wellington School of Medicine's Michael Baker have also appeared recently in the media with commentary on this outbreak.

We would like to continue listing Webster Centre researchers who appear in the media on our webpages, so if you would like us to feature your interview or commentary please email us at webstercentre@otago.ac.nz.

General Announcements and Upcoming Meetings



Rebecca Psutka
Coordinator

Please email the Webster Centre at: webstercentre@otago.ac.nz

- if there is a **scientific meeting** you would like highlighted either on the website or in the newsletter
- if you are not on the Webster Centre **email list**
- if your research relates to infectious diseases and would like to **join** the Webster Centre for Infectious Diseases
- if you have any comments or suggestions about this newsletter or any other Webster Centre related activity

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