



He Kete Kōrero



University of Otago, Wellington Newsletter | Autumn 2023

Dean's welcome

Tēnā koutou katoa

Welcome to the May 2023 issue of *He Kete Kōrero*.

It's been a busy start to the year and as always it has been a real pleasure to welcome new and returning students to campus. I've been heartened to see how well our students have settled in, and have been impressed by the resilience and community spirit shown in dealing with the ongoing impacts of Cyclone Gabrielle in areas across the North Island.

It is an unsettling time for everyone as the University looks for ways of dealing with the ongoing financial difficulties it faces and as we continue to work on developing the best solutions for our accommodation issues in Wellington.

Despite these challenges, we have much to celebrate. In this newsletter we highlight some of the amazing achievements of our people who are making significant contributions to our communities through their work.

I appreciate all you are doing to support each other within your teams and I am confident we will get through this if we work together. Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini. Our strength comes from working as a collective.

There is lots to be positive about.

Ngā mihi nui

PROFESSOR
WILLIAM LEVACK
Manutaki | Dean and
Head of Campus



Prime Minister's Prize

Associate Professor Dianne Sika-Paotonu has won the 2022 Prime Minister's Science Communication Prize for her work communicating on the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Associate Dean, Pacific, on the Wellington campus, and an immunologist of Tongan descent, Associate Professor Sika-Paotonu has been one of few Pacific voices providing regular commentary on the technical aspects of immunology, vaccines, the SARS-CoV-2 virus and infectious diseases.

She was nominated for the award by **Professor Parry Guilford**, the Director of the University of Otago's Centre for Translational Cancer Research. He says Associate Professor Sika-Paotonu stood out as a sensible and informed commentator during the pandemic.

"Her knowledge has always been expressed with grace and empathy for her audience. She is a highly effective communicator who takes her audience with her."

The Prime Minister's Science Communication Prize comes with \$75,000 in prize money and Associate Professor Sika-Paotonu plans to use the funds to support students and young people in the health, education and research sectors to become the next generation of science communicators, and to continue her science communication work.

Otago's Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Enterprise, **Professor Richard Blaikie**, says the University is exceptionally proud of the recognition for Associate Professor Sika-Paotonu.

"Her humble, thoughtful and respectful approach to communication means that her messages have been very well received by the communities of interest."

Professor Michael Baker from the Department of Public Health was the 2020 winner of the Science Communication Prize.



Minister of Research,
Science and Innovation
Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall
with Associate Professor
Sika-Paotonu at the
awards ceremony in
Wellington on 1 May.

Research grant success

Te Rōpū Rangahau Hauora a Eru Pōmare will work on a project to develop Māori-led programmes for pēpi, tamariki and whānau wellbeing and intergenerational playspaces centred on tikanga and te ao Māori as part of a major international collaboration.

The five-year project, led by the Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health in the USA, has been awarded US\$28 million (\$43 million NZD) from the LEGO Foundation's Build a World of Play Challenge.



Otago project lead **Dr Paula Thérèse Toko King** (Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Whātua, Waikato Tainui, Ngāti Maniapoto) says Te Rōpū Rangahau Hauora a Eru Pōmare will partner with Kōkiri Marae, in Lower Hutt, Toi Matarua Rangatahi Research, in Napier, and Te Hou Ora Whānau Services, in Dunedin, to promote traditional whānau models of wellbeing, nature-based recreational spaces, and cultural teachings which reflect the values of the communities involved.

The research team will also work with international Indigenous collaborators in the United States, Canada and Australia.

Other major research grants awarded to staff on the Wellington campus include:

HEALTH RESEARCH COUNCIL

Dr Hemakumar Devan from the Department of Medicine and **Dr Sarah Gordon** from the Department of Psychological Medicine receive Health Delivery Research Project Grants worth almost \$1.4 million each. Dr Devan will co-produce a whānau-focused storytelling intervention with the aim of supporting people to taper off the use of opioids prescribed for chronic non-cancer pain. Dr Gordon, who leads the World of Difference service user research group, will work on enabling supported decision-making through the use of mental health advance preference statements across mental health services.

Jo Hilder from the Department of Primary Health Care and General Practice and **Dr Annie Wong** from the Department of Medicine receive Health Delivery Research Activation Grants. Ms Hilder receives almost \$30,000 to co-design research on innovative vaccine delivery models for Māori and Pasifika, and Dr Wong receives \$27,000 to improve the diagnostic process of lung cancer by replacing invasive biopsies with blood-based tests of circulating tumour DNA (ctDNA).

NZ LOTTERY GRANTS BOARD, TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECTS

Dr Kim O'Sullivan, Department of Public Health: 'Toast Energy' Evaluating the health and wellbeing effects of a community-led energy wellbeing intervention, \$119,500.

Dr Sarah McKenzie, Department of Psychological Medicine: 'Picturing the invisible' A photovoice study with men who have experienced mild traumatic brain injuries, \$112,500.

Professor Louise Signal, Department of Public Health: 'Bombarding children with booze?' An objective analysis of children's exposure to alcohol online and what to do about it, \$117,000.

Pathology Article of the Year



Professor Scolyer (left) presents Professor Delahunt with the medal and certificate.

Professor Brett Delahunt ONZM KStJ FRSNZ from the Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine has won the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia's Article of the Year award for 2022.

The annual award is presented for the top research paper published in the College's journal *Pathology* and was for the article, 'Percentage grade 4 tumour predicts outcome for prostate adenocarcinoma in needle biopsies from patients with advanced disease: 10-year data from the TROG 03.04 RADAR trial'.

The paper was based on results of the RADAR oncology trial, a joint Australian-New Zealand study which focused on the most effective treatment for patients with inoperable prostate cancer.

The chair of the Article of the Year selection panel, Professor Richard Scolyer, said Professor Delahunt's paper was of outstanding scientific merit and was the most significant manuscript published during the year.

Professor Delahunt was presented with the award at the RCPA's Admission of New Fellows and Awards Ceremony in Melbourne on 25 February, held as part of the College's annual Pathology Update scientific meeting.

His co-authors, who include Otago colleagues **Associate Professor Diane Kenwright**, Head of the Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine on the Wellington campus, and Senior Lecturer **Associate Professor Michelle Thunders**, were also awarded certificates.

The article can be read here: [https://www.pathologyjournal.rcpa.edu.au/article/S0031-3025\(21\)00537-7/pdf](https://www.pathologyjournal.rcpa.edu.au/article/S0031-3025(21)00537-7/pdf)

Link Block refurbishment

The business case to create new teaching spaces and refurbish the Link Block has been approved by the Project Steering Committee and is now being considered by the Vice Chancellor's Senior Leadership Team.

The project includes the creation of new medium-sized classrooms to replace the temporary spaces being used at Massey University and the Hanson Street student hub as well as an upgrade of the heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems and the construction of new toilet facilities.

Dean and Head of Campus **Professor William Levack** says the work is regarded as necessary to ensure business continuity for the campus.

"Together with the work already underway on the Nordmeyer Lecture Theatre it means we will be able to consolidate more of our campus on the hospital site, with our own entrance and reception staff, by the beginning of next year."

The work is expected to be done in tandem with the seismic strengthening of the exterior being planned by Te Whatu Ora - Capital, Coast & Hutt Valley.

It is likely there will be some noise and disruption to affected areas of the campus for between six and nine months once work gets underway.

New voice for public health



Professor Baker with Gama Foundation benefactors Grant and Marilyn Nelson and their daughter Julie Squire (second from left) with the centre's Communication Lead Adele Broadbent on right.

The Public Health Communication Centre (PHCC) was launched at a celebratory opening event at the Wharewaka in February.

The new centre is led by inaugural director **Professor Michael Baker** with co-directors **Professor Nick Wilson** and **Professor Simon Hales**. Research affiliates **Dr Tim Chambers** and **Marnie Prickett** contribute to the work of the Centre, with Science Lead **Dr John Kerr** and Communication Lead **Adele Broadbent** the other key members of staff.

Professor Baker says the Centre will boost the reach and impact of public health research by providing high-quality analysis and commentary for the public, the media and decision-makers through its *Public Health Expert Briefing*. The *Briefing* is based on the long-running *Public Health Expert Blog* and continues its legacy of providing timely and impactful summaries of new research and public health issues.

The Public Health Communication Centre is hosted by the Department of Public Health and based on the fourth floor of the campus's Brandon Street office.

It is independently funded by an endowment from the Gama Foundation, which is managed by the University of Otago Foundation Trust.

To sign up for *The Briefing*, or to find out more, visit www.phcc.org.nz.

Improving health outcomes for transgender people

Dr Rona Carroll, a senior lecturer in the Department of Primary Health Care and General Practice, has led the development of the country's first national guidelines to support community GPs and nurse practitioners to prescribe gender affirming hormone therapy to transgender adults.



She hopes the guidelines, developed in collaboration with other experts, will contribute towards removing barriers to accessing gender affirming hormone therapy and in turn improve health outcomes for transgender people.

The Primary Care Gender Affirming Hormone Therapy Initiation Guidelines were launched in February. They include protocols for starting hormone therapy, patient information sheets and consent forms.

Dr Carroll says the guidelines are based on an informed consent approach where the primary health care team works in collaboration with patients to meet their gender goals, provides education about gender affirming hormone therapy and general health and helps to support patients' understanding of the risks and benefits of therapy so they can make well informed decisions about their health.

The guidelines are endorsed by the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners and can be read here: <https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/rainbow/>

On placement through a cyclone

When Cyclone Gabrielle hit the North Island in February, trainee interns from the University of Otago, Wellington, on placements in hospitals and general practices in Gisborne and Hawke's Bay were caught up in the worst storm to hit the country in decades.

Three final-year medical students, **Maia Tipene** (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Awa), **Denver Ruwhiu** (Ngāti Kahungunu ki Heretaunga, Ngāti Porou, Ngāpuhi) and **Meremaihi Jackson** (Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, Ngāi Tahu/Kāi Tahu, Ngāti Raukawa - Horowhenua/Manawatū) shared their experiences with the *Otago Bulletin*.

At the time the cyclone hit, Maia was on a full-year placement in paediatrics at Hawke's Bay Hospital in Hastings; Denver was completing her medicine placement at Hawke's Bay Memorial Hospital; and Meremaihi was on a six-week general practice placement at the Waikohu Health Centre in Te Karaka.

Read about their experiences here: <https://www.otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/otago0243442.html>



Maia Tipene doing voluntary work with Taskforce Kiwi. Photo by Heather Joy Milne/Taskforce Kiwi.

Ann Thornton retires



Ann Thornton and the Associate Dean Student Affairs, Associate Professor Mark Huthwaite, at the farewell morning tea.

Staff and students gathered at the Newtown campus in March to bid farewell to **Ann Thornton**, who retired from the University after 32 years.

In her 14 years as undergraduate student affairs administrator, Ann worked with thousands of radiation therapy and medical students, where her friendly, welcoming approach and open door policy earned her honorary 'auntie' status among the students.

The Dean and Head of Campus, **Professor William Levack**, says Ann was a hugely valued member of campus and contributed immensely to the success of the students on the Wellington campus.

"Through her dedication to the university, Ann helped thousands of students achieve their goals, as well as providing care and support to those facing challenges."

In addition to her work with students, Ann spent 20 years as a laboratory manager, where she made a major contribution to the success of the University's research laboratories. She also served for nine years as a departmental manager and worked for five years as a researcher.

Academic promotions

Academic staff from departments across the Wellington campus have been promoted to Professor and Associate Professor, an acknowledgement of their contributions to research and teaching, and their service to the University and community.

Two academic staff were promoted to Professor: **Susanna Every-Palmer**, the Head of the Department of Psychological Medicine and a forensic psychiatrist, whose research focuses on how to improve mental health services to better serve the people who use them; and **Nevil Pierse** from the Department of Public Health, who is Co-Director of the He Kāinga Oranga/Housing and Health Research Programme.



Rob Griffiths from the Department of Medicine, **Anaru Waa** from the Department of Public Health and **Joy Rudland**, the Director of the Faculty Education Unit, were promoted to Associate Professor while **Ruth Cunningham** and **Amanda Kvalsvig** from the Department of Public Health were promoted to Research Associate Professor.

The promotions were announced in December by Vice-Chancellor **Professor David Murdoch**, who praised the quality and achievements of the staff.

"In what has been a turbulent year, it is wonderful to be able to end it celebrating the research and teaching expertise of such a diverse group of people, and honouring the depth of academic talent we have at Otago."

The promotions took effect from February 1.

Events

12 June 2023 Inaugural Professorial Lecture

Professor Susanna Every-Palmer
'Talking about mental health'
Horne Lecture Theatre, Wellington Regional Hospital
Time: 5.30pm-7pm
<https://www.otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/events/otago0244313.html>

15 June 2023 Inaugural Professorial Lecture

Professor Nevil Pierse
'Numbers from a Kerry Statistician: Housing and Health'
Horne Lecture Theatre, Wellington Regional Hospital
Time: 5.30pm-7pm
<https://www.otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/events/otago0244305.html>



Finding joy on the water

It was all smiles as staff and students from across the campus took to the harbour in March to compete in the Wellington Dragon Boat Festival.

This year's team was made up of 23 people from across campus along with family members and partners. It included undergraduate and postgraduate students, academic and professional staff from the Departments of Medicine, Surgery & Anaesthesia, Primary Health Care & General Practice, Psychological Medicine, Public Health and External Engagement as well as Dean **William Levack**, and his wife, Jo White, who stepped in on race day to be team drummer.

The team undertook six weeks of dragon boat training under the tutelage of coach and sweep Jacob de Feijter before hitting the water for race day.

Organiser **Sophie Petelaud** from U-Owls (University of Otago, Wellington, Leisure and Sports) says the season was filled with fun, laughter, positive vibes and camaraderie.

This year's team was: Annie Wong, Cheryl Norrie, Courtney Ulrich, Ellie Johnson, Emily Cooney, Emma O'Loughlin, Farnaz Pourzand, Hannah Sullivan, Harriet Kerr, Jenny Visser, Jo White, Jon Graham, Kate Clarke, Lydia Legros, Matt Jenkins, Melanie Colls, Rachel Dohig, Renee Smith, Ryan Cullen, Sophie Petelaud, Tom McCarten, William Levack and Zara Mansoor.

Watch the video: <https://youtu.be/kC8qsZT4HgE>