

## Student leader honoured



Sixth-year medical student on the Wellington campus, **Selwyn Te Paa** (Ngāti Whātua), has been honoured for his medical student leadership by Te Ohu Rata o Aotearoa (Te ORA) Māori Medical Practitioners' Association.

Selwyn, who is President of Te Oranga – Māori Medical Students' Association Aotearoa, was presented with the Pharmac/Te ORA award for his leadership at Te ORA's awards ceremony, held

online this year. The event celebrates and acknowledges the success and achievements of Māori medical practitioners and medical students.

Selwyn has also been involved in running te reo classes for medical students on the Wellington campus, and with Ngā Puna Hauora – the Māori health professional student organisation, which organised three days of Matariki workshops for staff and students this year.

"I am extremely humbled by the award, but aware that I am simply a product of my iwi and those who raised me," he says.

"Māori have a long tradition of being leaders and navigators. It is my duty to uphold this tradition within healthcare to help ease the experience of Māori within a western medical system, with improving Māori health outcomes being the ultimate goal."

## Support for postgrad students

The Otago Postgraduate Association of Wellington (O-PAW) is strengthening its focus on fostering community among postgraduate students who are now based on multiple sites, or working from home.

Co-president **Tom Bergen** says the closure of the Academic Block last August had been tough on the postgraduate student community.

"We're working hard to improve communication and foster a sense of community among students, who are missing opportunities to network with others."

O-PAW has started a regular newsletter updating students on activities around campus and continues to host monthly academic workshops, including their 'Shut Up and Write' thesis writing sessions, as well as social events, such as bowling and getting together for after-work drinks.

O-PAW representatives meet monthly with Dean and Head of Campus **Professor William Levack** to discuss issues of interest, and are lobbying the University for an increase in student stipends for Wellington postgraduate students to cover higher accommodation costs.

Postgraduate students can get in touch with O-PAW through the Facebook group [www.facebook.com/groups/otagopostgradswellington/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/otagopostgradswellington/) or by email [uow.postgradreps@otago.ac.nz](mailto:uow.postgradreps@otago.ac.nz).



O-PAW members, back row from left Mino Cleverley, Dylan Fromentin and co-president Tom Bergen. Front row, from left, co-president Emily Paterson, Alice Freeman, Hannah Van Der Woude and Emma Symonds. Absent: Molly Dore, Alexander Hayward and Julie Artus.

## Goal setters

Two fifth-year medical students on the Wellington campus have been awarded Goal Setter awards from the Rotary Club of Port Nicholson.

Medical students **Ella Skudder** and **Ollie McCullough** both received awards of \$4,000 in recognition of their success in achieving goals, overcoming severe difficulties and giving service to the community.

The club noted Ella had spent two years away from school taking care of her sister, who was very ill, before she was able to return and study for university entrance. She has a special interest in patient mental health and wellbeing.

Ollie was inspired to pursue medicine after the death of his Mum as a teenager. Ollie says receiving an Otago University Tū Kahika Health Science scholarship in 2016 offered incredible support during a difficult time. He completed a Certificate of Health Sciences and a Bachelor of Science before beginning his medical studies. He is keeping an open mind about his future career options, but is interested in emergency medicine/critical care.

Awards convenor Jane Paterson says the judges were moved by Ollie and Ella's persistence and their determination to achieve their goals, despite facing tremendous difficulties in their young lives.



## Connecting with alumni

More than 100 people gathered to share stories and memories of times spent at Otago at an alumni event at the Wellington Club on the evening of 28 April.

Wellington-based alumni and friends were introduced to the newly-appointed Chancellor, **Mr Stephen Higgs**, and Vice-Chancellor, **Professor David Murdoch**, at the event. The two shared their visions for the University, and alumni were able to meet and chat with them, as well as networking with each other and reconnecting with the University.



Drs Graham Sharpe, Ken Romeril and Leona Wilson.

## First postgrad genomics course

The Wellington campus is to offer New Zealand's first postgraduate qualification in genomics.

The Postgraduate Certificate in Health Sciences endorsed in Genomic Health and Medicine will be taught online from next year.

Course convenor **Dr Michelle Thunders**, from the Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine, says its introduction reflects the revolutionary shift in healthcare being driven by genomics.

"We routinely encounter genomic terms in the media – PCR tests, consumer DNA tests, genome sequencing and targeted cancer treatments and it's become expected for health professionals to have knowledge in this area. This new course will enable them to build their knowledge while studying part-time."

More information about the programme will be available at a Genomic Health and Medicine Information Evening being held on Thursday, 13 October from 7pm to 8pm on Zoom. To find out more, visit [otago.ac.nz/genomichealth](https://otago.ac.nz/genomichealth) or email [michelle.thunders@otago.ac.nz](mailto:michelle.thunders@otago.ac.nz).

# He Kete Kōrero

University of Otago, Wellington Newsletter | Spring 2022



## Dean's welcome

Tēnā koutou katoa

Welcome to the Spring 2022 issue of He Kete Kōrero.

It's now more than a year since we had to leave our main Academic Block and the Link Block. It's been a challenging, frustrating and at times exhausting 12 months. I've greatly appreciated everyone's patience as we've worked to find solutions to our accommodation situation.

This month we've opened a student and library services hub and a Clinical Research Centre (CRC) which houses the Centre for Translational Research (CTR), taking us further along the way of being able to provide spaces for all staff and students.

Over the next six months, we'll be conducting a review of our core roles and values on the Wellington campus, and getting an overall perspective of the future of our campus. This work will be critical to the planning we are doing around the long-term future of our main Academic Block and will feed into the wider review of the Division of Health Sciences being conducted by Acting Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor Patricia Priest and Neil Gemmell, the Acting Deputy PVC. Please look out for opportunities to contribute to these discussions.

As we settle into working and studying in our new campus facilities, we'll be looking at ways of making our spaces uniquely our own. We'll also be creating more opportunities for us all to come together as a team and connect with one another. I'm very much enjoying starting the week with our Monday morning karakia and waiata sessions, and am looking forward to sharing more events in future, both big and small, with our UOW whānau.

Ngā mihi nui  
PROFESSOR  
WILLIAM LEVACK  
Manutaki | Dean and  
Head of Campus



## 3 Minute Thesis Winner

Wellington PhD candidate **Yasmin Nouri** has won best doctoral presentation at the University's Grand Final of the 2022 3 Minute Thesis competition.

Yasmin talked about her research into a new blood cancer treatment, CAR T-cell therapy. This novel treatment uses the body's own immune cells to eradicate cancer, by reprogramming them to recognise and then kill cancerous cells, similar to the way in which they usually kill pathogens.

Yasmin is in her last year of her PhD and is supervised by **Dr Michelle Thunders** in the Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine.

She won the Wellington heat of the 3 Minute Thesis competition on 28 June, and was awarded \$500 in prize money donated by event sponsor *Research for Life*. She competed against **Henry Fane De Salis**, from the Departments of Medicine and Psychological Medicine, who presented his research on the 'Love you back to life' residential treatment programme for substance abuse; **Emily Paterson**, from the Department of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Women's Health, who talked about novel diagnostic opportunities for endometriosis; and **Julie Artus** from the Department of Psychological Medicine, who discussed inpatient psychiatric services for children and adolescents in New Zealand.

Yasmin will now submit a video of her presentation, which will be judged against entries from university finalists from across Australia, New Zealand, Oceania and North-East and South-East Asia, in the virtual Asia-Pacific competition final on Wednesday, 19 October.



Professor Richard Blaikie, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Enterprise, presents the award to Yasmin.



## Research funding

Three PhD candidates on the Wellington campus have been awarded grants from Research for Life, the Wellington Medical Research Foundation.



**Molly Dore** from the Department of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Women's Health was awarded \$31,000 for research on treatment options for endometrial cancer. Her research investigates the role of cancer stem cells in the mechanism of resistance in women who do not respond to treatment with the contraceptive device, Mirena.



**Sonja Hummel** from the Department of Surgery and Anaesthesia receives a grant of \$19,000 for research seeking a better understanding of how the immune system contributes to the recovery and risks associated with heart attacks. Her work aims to improve the pathway of care for people living with the consequences of heart attacks.



**Emma Symonds** from the Department of Surgery and Anaesthesia was awarded a travel grant to present at the International Society for Extracellular Vesicles' annual meeting in Lyon, France, on her research into a breast reconstruction option for women who have had a mastectomy.

## Matariki events

Wellington staff and students celebrated Matariki with a range of events across campus in June, beginning with a Ngā Whetu Showcase, an information evening about Matariki with Māori Strategic Framework Manager **Toa Waaka**, a member of Māori astronomy organisation SMART.

Ngā Puna Hauora, the Māori health professional student organisation, organised three days of Matariki workshops in the Eru Pōmare Centre, where staff and students were able to weave flax stars or baskets, learn about the nine stars and sing and relax.

The start of the Māori New Year also provided an opportunity for staff and students to gather for a house warming at the Brandon Street offices.

Dean and Head of Campus **Professor William Levack** paid tribute to the enthusiasm of Ngā Puna Hauora and the students in bringing the events together, including **Monica Thompson-Tahau**, **Denver Ruwhiu**, **Helaman Luki**, **Selwyn Te Paa**, **Maia Tipene**, **Awhina Meikle**, **Rylee Dudley**, **Chloe Priebe** and **Amene Fuli-Chee**.

He acknowledged the enormous contribution made by **Associate Professor Bridget Robson**, Associate Dean Māori, in organising and facilitating this year's celebrations.



## Celebrating a career in paediatrics

A Festschrift was held to celebrate the career of **Professor Dawn Elder**, who retired from her roles as Deputy Dean and Head of the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, at the end of May.

The Festschrift brought together work acknowledging Professor Elder's contributions through her career as an academic paediatrician, researcher, teacher, mentor and as an astute clinician who contributed to service development locally and nationally. Her research interests have been wide-ranging, with specific interests in neonatology and sleep medicine in children.

Professor Elder was the first PhD student in the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, and this was celebrated with presentations from current post-graduate students.

Her successor as Head of Department, **Professor Esko Wiltshire**, says one of the most significant aspects of her career has been Professor Elder's contribution to child protection services, both in the Wellington region and nationally.

Professor Elder was presented with an award by New Zealand Police Assistant Commissioner Tusha Penny at the Police College in July for the more than 25 years she provided teaching for their Child Protection Investigation courses.

Professor Wiltshire says Dawn's wisdom, tenacity, insightfulness and hard work in building both clinical services and research capacity will be greatly missed by both her University and clinical colleagues.

Professor Elder continues her academic work on campus in a locum role this year.



Professor Wiltshire and Professor Elder.

## Student hub

The Wellington campus has opened a two-level student hub in a leased office space at 43 Hanson Street, near Wellington Hospital.

The space houses a student common room, study space and library services. Some of the rooms will be used as teaching spaces until new seminar rooms can be set up in the Link Block at Wellington Hospital.

Dean and Head of Campus **Professor William Levack** says he is delighted to be able to offer students a space to study and spend time between classes.

The new hub opened after a takahia waerea walk-through blessing led by Māori Strategic Framework Manager **Toa Waaka** on 26 August. A larger opening event is planned later to formally welcome staff and students to the premises.

The blessing was a combined one, and included the new Clinical Research Centre (CRC) on Level 9 (Level J) of the Ward Support Block beside Te Rōpū Rangahau Hauora a Eru Pōmare. The CRC houses the Centre for Translational Research (CTR), including the DXA bone density scanner, calorimetry equipment and a physiology suite, as well as a new 35-student teaching space.



Student space at Hanson Street.

## Health Research Council grants

Researchers on the Wellington campus have won project grants from the Health Research Council (HRC) for research on the impact of nitrate in drinking water on premature births and to improve the health and wellbeing of Māori re-entering the community after leaving prison.

The projects led by researchers from the Department of Public Health have each been awarded grants of \$2 million over three years.

The Kaupapa Māori project is being co-led by **Dr Paula Toko King** (Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Whātua, Waikato Tainui, Ngāti Maniapoto), of the Eru Pōmare Māori Health Research Unit, **Dr Ruth Cunningham** from the Department of Public Health and **Cheryl Davies** (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Wehi, Ngāti Mutunga o Wharekauri) from Kōkiri Marae. The project is the first in New Zealand to investigate health and wellbeing outcomes for Māori who have been incarcerated.

**Dr Tim Chambers** has won funding to study 700,000 births in New Zealand over the 15-year period to 2021 to investigate whether there is an association between nitrate in drinking water and preterm births. It will map exposure to nitrate during pregnancy, creating New Zealand's first national database of contaminants in drinking water.

The HRC also awarded a Health Delivery Research Activation Grant of \$30,000 over 12 months to **Dr Rosemary Hall** from the Department of Medicine to develop an image-based food diary application to simplify dietary tracking.



Dr Paula Toko King



Dr Tim Chambers



Dr Rosemary Hall

## Unique double honour

**Professor Brett Delahunt** ONZM KStJ FRSNZ, from the Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine has been awarded the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia's (RCPA) Silver Medal, the only person in the history of the College to receive both Gold and Silver Medals.

The Silver Medal, or Meritorious Service award, recognises Professor Delahunt's 14 "stellar" years of service as Editor of the College journal, *Pathology*. The citation credits his dedication to the role with a major increase in the journal's ranking and impact factor.

Professor Delahunt stepped down from the editorship of the journal in February, after transforming *Pathology* from a regional publication to one competing with mainstream UK and US pathology journals.

He was awarded the RCPA's Gold Medal and named a Distinguished Fellow of the College in 2009 for his contributions to the College, as well as for his research publications and international contributions.



In addition to his achievements as editor of *Pathology*, Professor Delahunt has more than 500 academic publications to his name.

He is conscious of the honour of being the only person in the College's 75-year history to receive both the gold and silver awards.

"I'm deeply honoured by this recognition from the College, particularly so as it comes from my peers in the field of pathology."

The President of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, Dr Lawrie Bott (left), presents Professor Delahunt with the silver medal at the College's headquarters in Sydney.



Gama Foundation founders Marilyn and Grant Nelson present Professor Hoek (right) with the award.

## Critic and Conscience of Society

**Professor Janet Hoek** from the Department of Public Health has been awarded the 2022 Critic and Conscience of Society Award by The Gama Foundation for her work on tobacco control.

The \$50,000 award from the philanthropic trust is given each year to an academic in recognition of their work providing the public with independent expert commentary on issues affecting Aotearoa New Zealand.

Professor Hoek is Co-Director of the ASPIRE 2025 Research Centre and for more than 20 years has been researching how policy measures could more effectively reduce the appeal, availability and accessibility of tobacco products.

The Gama Foundation's Grant Nelson praised Professor Hoek's steadfast long-term commitment to gathering the best-possible evidence around tobacco products and then using it to inform public and policymakers' understanding of a major public health issue.

Professor Hoek says: "It's an enormous honour to receive this award, which recognises a core role academics are privileged to have but that can be challenging to perform. I see this award as recognition of the major contributions ASPIRE has made to tobacco control policy."

"We will use this generous grant to strengthen our community connections and ensure our research continues to have real-world implications."

Professor Hoek is the second academic from the Department of Public Health on the Wellington campus to receive the award, with **Professor Michael Baker** a joint winner of the award in 2020 for his work keeping New Zealanders informed about COVID-19.

## A video showcase

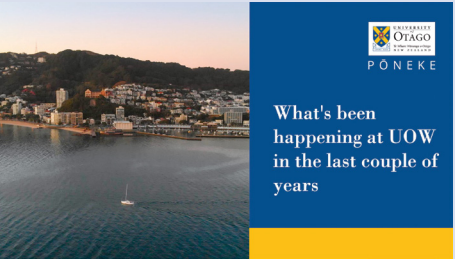
A new video by campus videographer and photographer **Luke Pilkinton-Ching** catalogues the highlights and challenges of the past few years on the Wellington campus.

The three-minute video traverses the first COVID-19 lockdown, celebratory inaugural public lectures, the closure of the academic block, the opening of new offices

and teaching spaces, along with staff and student involvement in research, education and the community, wrapped around stunning footage of Wellington.

The video was put together for this year's professional staff conference, *Te Herenga Tangata: Connected*, which was held online on August 31-September 1.

Watch the video, *What's been happening at UOW*, here: <https://youtu.be/cQGNALUISCO>



What's been happening at UOW in the last couple of years