



He Kete Kōrero

University of Otago, Wellington Newsletter | Spring 2023

Dean's welcome

Tēnā koutou katoa,

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

It's been lovely seeing the spring weather return to Wellington along with the kerurū and kākā from Zealandia.

We have had a busy and productive year, with successes across our teaching and research activities. It is wonderful to see the achievements of **Poutoko Taiea Sesquicentennial Distinguished Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman** recognised with the award of the University's top honour – the Distinguished Research Medal for 2023.

This year's medical, physiotherapy and radiation therapy students are almost about to graduate and enter the New Zealand workforce. We should feel proud of the contribution we have made to this much-needed work. It is a great pleasure to see their skills develop during their time with us and to celebrate their achievements at our annual Hui Whakanui Taurira Awards event.

I'm excited by our ongoing building work which is strongly focused on reconnecting our students with staff and on bringing our teams and departments together. I appreciate everyone has made concessions to allow the space we have available to work for us and I am looking forward to being able to reconnect with everyone back on our Newtown campus sites next year.

Ngā mihi nui,

PROFESSOR
WILLIAM LEVACK
Manutaki | Dean and
Head of Campus



The way we care

A documentary on palliative care which follows five families as they care for a dying relative has been produced by **Associate Professor Sinéad Donnelly** from the Department of Medicine.

'Te Whakahemohemo, The Way We Care', premiered at the Roxy Cinema in Wellington in October. It shows family members sharing their stories directly with the camera, and highlights the care provided by nurses and doctors at home, in hospital and at hospices.

Associate Professor Donnelly, who produced and directed the film, says it is a celebration of caring.

"As a palliative medicine physician, I meet patients who are facing their imminent death and get to know their whānau. I always find it inspiring and I wanted to create the opportunity for more people to hear their stories.

"The focus of the documentary is to look at the gift, the aroha and the challenges of caring for someone who is dying. My hope is that the people on screen will be like pebbles thrown into the pool of life whose courage and care create ever expanding ripples."

Associate Professor Donnelly says she's grateful for the generosity of whānau who shared their grief, vulnerability and aroha.

The film has been made to broadcast standards to allow it to be shown to a broad range of audiences nationally and internationally.

Associate Professor Donnelly also plans to use it as an educational resource for nursing and medical students as well as in postgraduate health care settings.

'Te Whakahemohemo' is the latest in a series of documentaries she has made on palliative care topics.

They include 'Going Home', which has been shown on Māori Television, and is used in workshops with fourth-year medical students as they explore social, spiritual and cultural aspects of dying and death.

Her previous films can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/album/5795526>



Associate Professor Donnelly (right)
with Ahn-Dao Pham, one of 90 guests
who attended the screening.



Capturing the beauty of our oceans

Dr Judy Ormandy, from the Department of Obstetrics, Gynaecology & Women's Health, has had her photography skills recognised in the annual Otago Bulletin photo competition.

Dr Ormandy entered two photos in the competition: an image of her dive buddy with a weedy sea dragon which she took while scuba diving in Deep Glen Bay in Tasmania and a shot of a beach goer silhouetted against a sunset at Taputeranga Marine Reserve on Wellington's south coast.

Her photos were chosen as notable entries by the judges.

Dr Ormandy says she thinks of herself as a scuba diver who snaps photos, rather than as a photographer.

"Photography allows me to share the amazing flora and fauna found underwater and I hope to be able to encourage others to protect and treasure our oceans as taonga."

This year's competition attracted more than 140 entries from staff and students across the University.



Health Research Council funding

Researchers on the Wellington campus have won Health Research Council funding for studies across a range of areas from cancer care for Māori to improving community re-entry pathways for mokopuna who have been incarcerated.

Associate Professor Jason Gurney (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine) from the Department of Public Health has been awarded a \$5 million programme grant to lead a team of researchers to build the evidence required to drive an improvement in the availability and accessibility of cancer services for Māori.

Dr Paula King (Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Whātua, Waikato Tainui, Ngāti Maniapoto) from Te Rōpū Rangahau Hauora a Eru Pōmare and Charlizza Matehe (Ngāti Kahungunu) from Toi Matarua have been awarded Rangahau Hauora Māori Health Project funding of almost \$2 million. Their co-design research project will develop ways of improving community re-entry pathways for young people aged between 10 and 19 years who have been incarcerated in youth justice residences and prisons.

Bernadette Jones from the Department of Medicine and the Dean of the School of Physiotherapy, **Professor Leigh Hale**, have been awarded a \$5 million programme grant to build Aotearoa-specific knowledge about supported self-management for underserved populations living with lifelong conditions including Māori and Pacific peoples, Tāngata Whaikaha (Māori with disability) and those experiencing learning (intellectual) disability.

Dr Caroline Halley and **Professor Julian Crane** from the Department of Medicine have been awarded a project grant of almost \$2 million to investigate whether the presence of farm-like microbes in homes is reducing the levels of asthma in children aged 12.

Dr Annie Wong from the Department of Medicine, **Dr Kathryn Hally** from the Department of Surgery and Anaesthesia and **Dr Alice Kim** from the Dean's Department have been awarded Emerging Researcher grants to the value of \$250,000 each. Dr Wong aims to improve the diagnostic process of lung cancer by replacing invasive biopsies with blood-based tests of circulating tumour DNA (ctDNA). Dr Hally will investigate the immune response to surgery as a way of predicting adverse postoperative recovery. Dr Kim will examine the effects of climate variability on the risk of enteric diseases.

Heart Foundation funding

Dr Pritika Narayan from the Department of Surgery and Anaesthesia has been awarded Heart Foundation funding to investigate the relationship between clinical features, clinical outcomes and genetics for people who have experienced life-threatening premature coronary events and identify as Fijian.

Dr Narayan has been awarded two grants, a Research Fellowship worth \$341,000 over three years and a \$119,000 Project Grant.

She says premature coronary artery disease is known to have a genetic basis linked with ancestry, but evidence for this is significantly lacking for the ethnic minority groups living in Aotearoa.

"Peoples from Fiji make up almost two per cent of Aotearoa's population, but incorrect ethnicity capture means their true disease burden is not accurately reported. Our preliminary analysis shows that under 40 years of age, almost 20 per cent of acute coronary events occur in people who identify as Fijian, Fijian Indian, or as Indians born in Fiji."

She says the research has the potential to improve risk assessment, disease stratification, and drug discovery for premature coronary events among ethnic minority groups, and to shape policy and practice to further improve heart health for vulnerable groups.



Otago Research Awards

Poutoko Taiea Sesquicentennial Distinguished Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman CNZM QSO FRSNZ has been awarded the Distinguished Research Medal in this year's Otago Research Awards.

The Distinguished Research Medal is the most prestigious award the University presents annually. It aims to promote research at Otago and give recognition to the outstanding performance of an individual researcher or research team.

Acting Vice-Chancellor **Professor Helen Nicholson** says Professor Howden-Chapman's impact on New Zealand has been extensive and the award is a well-deserved recognition of decades of work.

"Professor Howden-Chapman's demonstrated commitment to improving health outcomes, and her leadership of her outstanding multi-disciplinary research team, have been a critical influence on public policy in Aotearoa."

Co-director with **Professor Nevil Pierse** of He Kāinga Oranga/Housing and Health Research Programme on the Wellington campus, Professor Howden-Chapman and her team, along with Māori community collaborators, have been conducting world-leading research on healthy homes for almost three decades.

Together their research findings form a base of evidence showing that warm, dry, safe housing significantly reduces the rates of infectious, respiratory and cardiovascular disease and deaths, and slips, trips and falls, particularly in children and older people.

Three researchers from the Wellington campus won Early Career Awards for Distinction in Research: **Dr Matt Jenkins** (Department of Psychological Medicine); **Dr Kimberley O'Sullivan** (Department of Public Health); and **Dr Hemakumar Devan** (Department of Medicine).



Poutoko Taiea Sesquicentennial
Distinguished Professor
Philippa Howden-Chapman
CNZM QSO FRSNZ.

Neuropsychology training a first for NZ



The Wellington campus has launched a distance-taught postgraduate training programme in neuropsychology, the first of its kind in New Zealand.

Convenor **Dr Paul Skirrow** from the Department of Psychological Medicine says the two-year Postgraduate Diploma in Neuropsychology (PGDipNeuropsych) is a part-time course, designed to allow registered psychologists to do the vocational training alongside their usual clinical work.

He says neuropsychology training has traditionally been medically orientated, with most research and practice being imported from overseas.

"We'll be trying to blend the best of those international approaches with our unique New Zealand knowledge and cultures to train practitioners who can help meet the needs of the people of Aotearoa.

"Students will learn about the cognitive, psychological and medical profiles of acquired neurological conditions like traumatic brain injury, stroke and dementia, as well as developmental conditions, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism. They'll be learning about neuropsychological assessment and rehabilitation techniques and gaining an understanding of the roles of their colleagues in neurology, neurosurgery, neuroradiology and rehabilitation medicine."

Dr Skirrow says there is a long-term shortage of neuropsychologists in New Zealand, and graduates of the course are likely to be in high demand.

The course includes two three-day block courses a year in Wellington, but the majority of the teaching will be online.

The first students will begin studying for the diploma in February.

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/courses/subjects/npsy>

New role for Associate Professor Dianne Sika-Paotonu

Associate Professor Dianne Sika-Paotonu has been appointed Associate Dean (Pacific) for the Division of Health Sciences.

An immunologist of Tongan descent, Associate Professor Sika-Paotonu was previously Associate Dean (Pacific) on the Wellington campus. She has worked for the University for five years.

Health Sciences Acting Pro-Vice-Chancellor **Professor Trish Priest** says Associate Professor Sika-Paotonu will bring a wide range of academic expertise and a passionate advocacy for Pacific health equity issues to the role.

Associate Professor Sika-Paotonu says she is appreciative of the chance to continue the "outstanding, significant and positive" work of her predecessor in the role, **Dr Xaviour Walker**.

"I am very grateful to have the opportunity to ensure the continuation of Otago's Pacific focus for the Health Sciences Division. I am fully committed to supporting Otago achieve its Pacific strategic vision, both within Aotearoa and in the wider region."

Associate Professor Sika-Paotonu completed a PhD in Immunology at the Malaghan Institute of Medical Research at Victoria University of Wellington, researching ways of improving cancer vaccines to generate stronger immune responses against cancer.

She currently leads research in drug design for rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease prevention, on heart health equity and infectious diseases and on early cancer detection for vulnerable communities.

She will continue to be based on the Wellington campus.



Alumni event in Wellington

More than 80 people attended a gathering of University of Otago alumni in Wellington in August.

The event, held at St John's Bar & Eatery, brought together a wide range of alumni, including recent graduates and others who have been regularly attending events for some years.

The Deputy Dean on the Wellington campus, **Associate Professor Lynn McBain**, warmly welcomed alumni to the event and talked about work being done by staff on the capital city campus. Deputy Vice-Chancellor (External Engagement) **Professor Tony Ballantyne** also spoke to alumni.

The keynote speaker, **Professor Cliff Abraham**, from the Department of Psychology in Dunedin, spoke on the topic of 'Alzheimer's Disease: Challenge and Hope'. His presentation sparked much interest and many alumni took the opportunity to speak to him afterwards.



Professor Abraham talking about Alzheimer's Disease at the event on 29 August.



Alumni Caitlin Baumann, Bryn Jenkins and Finn Shewell.

The ethics of AI in healthcare

Associate Professor Angela Ballantyne from the Bioethics Centre and the Department of Primary Care and General Practice was among international experts who gathered at a meeting in Singapore in April to discuss the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) in healthcare innovation.

An Associate Professor of Bioethics, who teaches medical ethics for the fourth and fifth year advanced learning in medicine (ALM) programme on the Wellington campus, her presentation focused on ethical issues in global health AI screening tools.

She says while much of the current discussion about AI is focused on improving already excellent standards of clinical care in high-income countries, AI has significant potential to improve access to basic healthcare in low- and middle-income countries.

"The World Health Organization estimates that by 2030 there will be a shortfall of 18 million health workers in these countries. AI and telemedicine have the potential to make health services accessible to remote and underserved populations."

The symposium, hosted by the SingHealth Duke-NUS Health Services Research Institute, brought together experts from Europe, the United States, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand from diverse backgrounds, including government health agencies, medicine, computer science, engineering, clinical trials, law and bioethics.

"Interdisciplinary forums like this are essential to help us grapple with the complex implications of AI in healthcare."

A farewell for Kerry Hurley

There were lots of laughs and memories shared as a large group of staff and students gathered on campus in September to farewell **Kerry Hurley**, who has left the University after almost 20 years, most recently in the role of Client Services Administrator for the Department of Public Health.

The former Head of the Department, **Professor Louise Signal**, told those at the celebratory morning tea that Kerry had been a vital part of the public health team.

"If anything was needed, the catch cry was always 'ask Kerry'."

"She has been the leader of manaakitanga and caring for people here in public health over all of those 19 years. She has welcomed at least 106 new staff to the department and hundreds of students. She's organised at least 10 retirement farewells and at least 35 baby showers."

The school's Associate Dean Māori, **Associate Professor Bridget Robson**, told those at the event that Kerry had been the school's toka tū moana, or standing rock in stormy seas.

"You have been someone who has built whakawhanaungatanga for the kura. That makes you a rangatira, someone who brings a group together with a purpose."

Kerry served under seven heads of department during her tenure and managed 19 of the 26 annual Public Health Summer Schools.

Public Health Summer School 2024

The Public Health Summer School returns to the Wellington campus in February with a wide range of one to two-day courses on offer, some available online.

Eighteen courses will be held between 12 and 23 of February, of which eight will cover new topics. The courses will cover areas including cancer prevention, hauora Māori, Pacific health, and public health communication. There will be several workshops available on research methods, which will be of value to staff and students engaged in research in any academic field.

The full summer school programme will be available in late October.

Visit the website otago.ac.nz/uowsummerschool for updates, or email fran.wright@otago.ac.nz if you would like to be added to the early notice list.

