



He Kete Kōrero

University of Otago, Wellington Newsletter | Summer 2022

Dean's welcome

Tēnā koutou katoa

Welcome to the December 2022 issue of He Kete Kōrero.

It has been another year of challenges dealing with the ongoing global pandemic and our earthquake-challenged buildings, and even with a fire which disrupted our end-of-year student celebration.

I am tremendously appreciative of the outstanding efforts made by our UOW team to keep our campus not just running, but humming through these difficult situations. This newsletter is full to the brim with the achievements of our people, who continue to be awarded major research grants, be recognised nationally and internationally and deliver top-class teaching.

Now that we are settling into our new office and teaching spaces, I'm looking forward to us all having the opportunity to develop new routines and adjust to new ways of operating on our dispersed campus.

We will be taking the chance in the new year to start developing a forward-looking strategic plan for the Wellington campus and we will be asking you all to contribute your views on the priorities, opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

I've been very happy to be able to welcome Associate Professor Lynn McBain on board as Deputy Dean this year. She brings a wealth of experience in leadership, clinical practice, education and research to the role and will provide cover for me when I'm away.

It was a great pleasure to be able to celebrate the achievements of our talented students at our Hui Whakanui Tauira awards in November. The awards offer a vivid reminder each year of the tremendous depth of talent among our UOW students.

May you all have a safe and restful festive season whether you are at home or away.

Meri Kirihimete

PROFESSOR
WILLIAM LEVACK
Manutaki | Dean and
Head of Campus



Celebrating students

Staff and students from the Wellington campus gathered at the Hui Whakanui Tauira Awards ceremony last month to celebrate student achievement.

The hui, held on the Massey University campus, was a farewell to the graduating medical class and a celebration of postgraduate and undergraduate student prize winners.

Special guests at the event included **Dr Di Sarfati**, former Head of the Department of Public Health and now Director-General of Health and Chief Executive at Manatū Hauora Ministry of Health, and the Acting Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Health Sciences, **Professor Neil Gemmell**, who were on hand to present prizes.

Among the prizes awarded on the night were the Vera Keefe-Ormsby Prize in Māori Health, sponsored by Te Ohu Rata o Aotearoa – Māori Medical Practitioners' Association (Te ORA), which was awarded to **Cheryl Davies** (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Mutunga ki te Wharekauri). Cheryl, who completed a postgraduate qualification in Public Health, was also bestowed with the honour of wearing the kākahu in recognition of student leadership. The inaugural LifeBlood Trust John Carter Memorial Prize for Excellence in Haematology, which honours the late **Associate Professor John Carter**, was awarded to **Joshua Chin** and accepted on his behalf by student representative **Tara Cleverley**.



Associate Professor Bridget Robson, Associate Dean Māori, presents the award to Cheryl Davies.





Wellington PhD candidate **Yasmin Nouri** gave the postgraduate student address at the event and was presented with her certificate for winning this year's international Matariki Network Three Minute Thesis competition.

Some of the loudest cheers of the night were reserved for trainee intern **Brandon Nunns**, who was awarded the Graham Francis Hall Prize for overall excellence in the three clinical years as well as the top prizes for psychiatry, clinical medicine and clinical surgery and joint top prize for paediatrics, an award shared with **Olivia Parker**.

The trainee intern awards were the last to be presented before the event was cut short when staff and students had to evacuate the venue because of a minor kitchen fire.

A complete list of prize winners is available on the Wellington website:

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/wellington/about/awards/otago0237378.html>

Future planning for the Wellington campus

Staff and students will be invited to contribute their views on the priorities, opportunities and challenges for the Wellington campus as part of a strategic review of the school.

Dean and Head of Campus **Professor William Levack** has appointed **Professor Tony Dowell**, from the Department of Primary Health Care and General Practice, to consult widely with staff, students and external stakeholders to develop a 20-year strategic plan for the campus. Professor Levack says the work will form the basis for planning the campus's long-term accommodation needs, and will also contribute to the wider review into the structure of the Division of Health Sciences.

Professor Dowell is a former Deputy Dean of the Wellington campus and has served as Head of Department for the Departments of Primary Health Care and General Practice and Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Women's Health. He has been a member of the academic staff and has worked as a GP at the Island Bay Medical Centre since moving from the UK to New Zealand in 1997.

Professor Dowell says the review provides an opportunity for Wellington staff and students to think broadly about their vision for the campus.

"At the same time, it is important that we focus on what staff want and need to carry out their roles, and to think about how we can create a heart and a hub for students."

Professor Dowell plans to contact all staff about the review, but says anyone who would like to contribute their initial thoughts can contact him by email at tony.dowell@otago.ac.nz.



Funding for research

Associate Professor Nevil Pierse has been awarded a grant of \$5.8 million over five years to bring together world-leading experts to ensure Aotearoa's housing support system is sustainable, effective and whānau-centred.

The grant, from the MBIE Endeavour Research Programme, will focus on improving the housing system for children and young people experiencing homelessness.

Associate Professor Pierse, the Co-Director of the He Kāinga Oranga/Housing and Health Research Programme, says inadequate housing is one of the greatest barriers preventing the Government from achieving its vision of making Aotearoa New Zealand the best place to be a child.

"The Government is set to spend \$30 billion on housing over the next five years, but we don't know what type of housing actually most benefits our children. The goal of this programme is to create evidence to support the development and realisation of housing support systems that improve outcomes for tamariki."

Other major research grants for staff of the Wellington campus include:

SWEDISH RESEARCH COUNCIL

Associate Professor Eileen McKinlay, the Director of the Centre for Interprofessional Education, and **Dr Linda Gulliver** from the Dunedin campus are partners in a 6 million Swedish krone (NZ\$900,000) Swedish Research Council grant. The four-year study of interprofessional education (IPE) is a collaboration between the University of Otago, Linköping University in Sweden, the Arctic University of Norway and the University of Wollongong in Australia. Associate Professor McKinlay and Dr Gulliver will provide a case study of the University of Otago's rural immersion IPE programmes in Tairāwhiti and Greymouth, as such programmes are not offered by the other countries involved.

HEALTH RESEARCH COUNCIL CAREER DEVELOPMENT AWARDS

Dr Cristina Cleghorn, Department of Public Health, receives a Sir Charles Hercus Fellowship to model the health and equity impacts of a range of dietary policies in New Zealand worth \$600,000 over four years.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH COVID-19 RESEARCH FUND

Dr Tim Chambers, Department of Public Health: The role of digital contact tracing to support improved pandemic responses, \$360,000.

Dr Jennifer Summers, Department of Public Health: Understanding key epidemiological features of the COVID-19 pandemic in New Zealand to improve the response, \$483,000.

Dr Julie Bennett, Department of Public Health: Understanding the impact of vaccination on COVID-19 infection and long-term health outcomes, \$486,000.

ROCHE TRANSLATIONAL CANCER RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

Dr Annie Wong, from the Department of Medicine, and Dr Kirsty Danielson, from the Department of Surgery and Anaesthesia, have been awarded the New Zealand Society for Oncology Roche Translational Cancer Research Fellowship to investigate the development of a blood test to diagnose lung cancer, \$30,000.



Associate Professor Nevil Pierse.



Royal Society honours researchers

Professor Michael Baker from the Department of Public Health has been awarded the Callaghan Medal by the Royal Society Te Apārangi for providing science-informed commentary on the COVID-19 pandemic and other major public health issues in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The medal, which is for outstanding contributions to science communication and for raising public awareness of the value of science to human progress, was awarded at a ceremony at Parliament last month.

The Royal Society Te Apārangi noted Professor Baker's work providing commentary on a wide range of health issues and his use of multiple channels to engage with the wider public, decision makers and key groups of practitioners over his 30-year career.

His work since 2020 has been dominated by assisting with the COVID-19 pandemic response and has included strong scientific advocacy for the elimination strategy.

Professor Baker says the award provides a strong acknowledgement that communication to policy makers and the public is an essential part of scientific research and knowledge translation.

"This requirement is particularly important for infectious diseases where rapid action is critical for responding to serious outbreaks and pandemics."

Professor Baker was one of two Otago academics honoured by the Royal Society at the Wellington awards ceremony. He was joined by **Professor Hallie Buckley** from the Department of Anatomy in Dunedin who received the Mason Durie Medal, awarded for outstanding contributions to the social sciences that have had an international impact.

University of Otago Vice-Chancellor **Professor David Murdoch** congratulated Professors Baker and Buckley.

"Both are respected leaders in their fields, and could not be more deserving of these honours."



Corey Leaupepe (left), Urata Sofai (second from left) and Pio Lupo (far right).

Pacific scholarships

Wellington medical students **Corey Leaupepe**, **Pio Lupo** and **Urata Sofai** have been awarded scholarships from the Pasifika Medical Association (PMA).

The three receive Papa'ali'i Dr Semisi Ma'ia'i scholarships, awarded annually by the PMA to Pacific medical students in their fifth year of study at the University of Otago.

They were formally presented with their awards at the PMA Scholarship Cocktail Evening in Auckland in July.

New appointments

Academic staff from the Wellington campus have been appointed to new roles in the areas of public health, Pacific health and genetics.

Dr Ruth Cunningham and **Associate Professor Jason Gurney** from the Department of Public Health are among the expert advisers appointed to a new national Public Health Advisory Committee, set up to provide independent evidence-based advice to the NZ government on the long-term health challenges facing Aotearoa.

Associate Professor Dianne Sika-Paotonu, Associate Dean Pacific, has been elected to chair the Health Research Council's Pacific Health Research Committee. The committee provides advice to the HRC on Pacific health research priorities and Pacific health research workforce development.

Dr Michelle Thunders from the Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine has been appointed chair of the governance board for the Genetics Mātai Ira Otago Research Centre which brings together genetics and genomics researchers and teachers from across University of Otago campuses.

Work on Nordmeyer to begin in April

Seismic strengthening work on the Nordmeyer Lecture Theatre is expected to begin in April, with plans to have the building open for lectures at the start of the first semester in 2024.

The lecture theatre and the adjacent academic building were closed in August 2021, when structural engineers found the buildings to be earthquake prone.

Senior Project Manager **Steven Ireland** says a structural steel frame will be constructed for the building to increase its seismic rating to 67 per cent of the New Building Standard. A front-of-house reception area will be built just inside the new main entrance on the ground floor Level C.

Ireland says the Nordmeyer plays a vital role in teaching students and is one of the most important buildings for the University to reopen.

Large group lectures will continue to be held on the Massey University campus until the end of next year.



The project team Steven Ireland (left) with Ana Sanches, Project Coordinator, Campus Development and Steve Eastall, Facilities Manager, Property Services, in the Nordmeyer Lecture Theatre.

Spotlight on student research

Students from three Otago campuses gathered in Wellington in December to present their research at the annual Department of Psychological Medicine student symposium.

Now in its third year, the event has grown from being an event for Wellington-based PhD students, to include students from Dunedin and Christchurch, registrars' scholarly projects and summer studentships. Research was presented on a wide range of subjects, from physical activity subsidies for marginalised communities to the complexities of child and adolescent mental health services.

The symposium was opened by the co-president of the Otago Postgraduate Association of Wellington, **Tom Bergen** (Ngāti Ruanui), who guided participants through taonga tākaro, traditional Māori games.

Associate Professor Giles Newton-Howes presented awards to **Matt Richardson** (Dunedin campus, 'most potential for impact'), **Vanessa Gray** (Christchurch campus, 'best communicator'), and **Claudia Garcia** (Dunedin campus, 'people's choice').

Acting postgraduate coordinator **Dr Matthew Jenkins** says: "In a changing research landscape, students bring so much to the table in terms of fresh perspectives and ideas. The symposium has gone from strength to strength in the past few years, both in terms of quality and in the range of presentations."



Sweet treats for mental health

Staff and postgraduate students from the Department of Psychological Medicine raised \$360 for the Mental Health Foundation with their Great Brandon Street Bake Sale in October.

The bake sale was held to mark Mental Health Awareness Week, run each year by the Mental Health Foundation. This year's theme was 'Reconnect – with the people and places that lift you up, hei pikinga waiora'.



Maria Fitzmaurice, Kerrie Harford and Mary Buchanan on duty at the bake sale.

Student-led sustainability group

A group of Wellington medical students have set up the Sustainability Social Group (SSG) to lead sustainability initiatives on the University campus and at Te Whatu Ora – Capital, Coast and Hutt Valley.

One of the first projects initiated by the three founders, **Angad Chauhan**, **Isaac Bush** and **Ammar Manasawala**, has been to run weekly rubbish clean ups around Wellington Hospital at lunch times.

Angad says it's a great way to have a break from the hospital and enjoy the outdoors, even if only for a short time each week.

"The street clean ups are only the first of many initiatives we are working on in the field of sustainability. Our future plans involve tree planting initiatives, improvements in the waste management of soft plastics and batteries, and looking at the sustainable use of expired medical waste."

For more information, or to join the group visit the Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ssguow/>



The street clean up group (L to R): Isaac Bush, Lane McLeod, Ammar Manasawala, Stephenie Zoe Heng, Fatima Zawari, Patchara Jirapanyayut, Rachael Bergin, Tanya Divekar and Angad Chauhan. Absent: Alastair Hadlow and Anjali Gentejohann.

Events

7-17 February 2023 Public Health Summer School

One to two-day courses on a wide range of topics in public health, from infectious diseases to cancer prevention. The 15 courses will be held across several locations in Wellington, with some available online. Staff and student 50 per cent discount plus a 25 per cent early bird discount for registrations by 21 December. <https://otago.ac.nz/uowsummerschool>

23 February 2023 COVID & Work

'Collaborating to promote safe, sustainable and supportive workplaces'

Zoom webinar

Time: 9.30am-4pm

<https://events.otago.ac.nz/covidandwork>

9 March 2023 Inaugural Professorial Lecture

Professor Rebecca Grainger, Department of Medicine
'Products, processes and people: making sense in medicine'
Horne Lecture Theatre, Wellington Regional Hospital
Time: 5.30-7pm