

UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO, CHRISTCHURCH

Newsletter

DECEMBER 2010

CHRISTCHURCH



Greetings

2010 has been an eventful year for both the University of Otago, Christchurch, and Cantabrians.

It will probably go down in history as the 'Year of the Earthquake'.

This seismic event affected the University's community, staff, students and buildings in a variety of ways.

But despite the earthquake, the aftershocks, the damage and the disruptions, I believe that Christchurch and the University of Otago, Christchurch campus, will ultimately emerge all the stronger.

There have been several key senior staff appointments at The University of Otago, Christchurch, during 2010.

Professor Bridget Robinson was appointed in September to the new position of Mackenzie Chair in Cancer Medicine.

Professor Robinson has long worked as both an oncologist with the Canterbury District Health Board, and as a teacher and researcher with the University of Otago, Christchurch.

Her new role means she will enhance the profile of cancer care and research in Canterbury.

Professor Philip Schluter has recently been appointed to the Chair in Public Health. Professor Schluter grew up in Christchurch but comes to us from Auckland's University of Technology, where he was Professor of Biostatistics.

Earlier this year long-time staff member Associate Professor Lutz Beckert stepped up into the role of Head of Medicine. There is a profile on Associate Professor Beckert in this newsletter.

Associate Professor Andrew Day became Head of Paediatrics earlier this year. His specialist area is inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis) in children. His research includes new treatments for IBD (particularly anti-inflammatories) and bacteria which may be causing the condition.

Dr Lisa Whitehead became the new Director of the Centre for Postgraduate Nursing Studies at the beginning of 2010. Dr Whitehead's research interests include the assessment and management of fatigue in primary care, self-management of long-term conditions, and the role of family in managing chronic illness.

These senior staff members and their colleagues are constantly working to produce research that advances our understanding of health sciences. Our teachers work hard to train outstanding medical students, postgraduate nurses, health professionals and biomedical researchers. This striving for excellence has been the way of the Christchurch campus for almost 40 years.

In February 2012, we will welcome our 40th class of fourth year medical students.

This anniversary will be marked by public lectures about the school, its history and our plans for the future.

Thank you for taking an interest in the University of Otago, Christchurch. We will keep you updated on progress towards the 40th anniversary along with other developments in newsletters next year.

Professor Peter Joyce
DEAN

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The Christchurch Experience

40 Years of Research and Teaching
1973-2012



Christchurch woman Jenna Hudson, 20, toasts her success at giving up smoking as part of a University of Otago research project.

“I realised that smoking was probably a big part of why Dad died when he was just 42 (years). He smoked like a train for most of his life.”

When her father died of a heart attack, 16-year-old Jenna Hudson became a ‘pack a day’ smoker.

Hudson initially started smoking at age 14 because ‘everyone else was doing it and it seemed the cool thing to do’.

She was quickly sharing a pack of 30 cigarettes with a friend every week.

“When Dad died it was really stressful. Because I was smoking anyway I just kind of got into it more,” Hudson says.

“I knew it was bad for me and Mum kept saying I stunk of smoke and should give up, but I just tried not to think about what it was doing to me.”

Now aged 20, Hudson is part of a University of Otago smoking cessation study.

The study is being run in Christchurch and Wellington.

It is testing the effectiveness of Zonnic (a new nicotine mouth-spray which helps reduce cravings for cigarettes) taken together with nicotine patches.

Nicotine patches give you small continuous doses of nicotine through the skin which helps reduce withdrawal symptoms from stopping smoking.

Zonnic is likely to help more people quit because when they get cravings to smoke they can use Zonnic instead of smoking a cigarette. Zonnic causes an immediate mild peppery tingle in your mouth (caused by nicotine). It helps reduce your craving to smoke within minutes.

Hudson, now 20, has had great success with the study.

She has been smoke-free since signing up to the research project in Christchurch in April.

Her father’s death prompted her to smoke heavily.

But it was also the reason she gave up.

“I realised that smoking was probably a big part of why Dad died when he was just 42 (years). He smoked like a train for most of his life.”

Hudson’s mother saw an advertisement for the study in a newspaper and suggested her daughter join.

“I took to the programme like a duck to water because I had thought about Dad and what smoking did to him and I was determined to give up.”

Hudson says she still wants to smoke when she has an alcoholic drink, but gets her Zonnic spray out instead.

“I probably still think about having a smoke most days, but I really want to stop and I think about how disgusting I find the smell now and how bad it is for my health,” she says.

“I know Mum is really pleased I’m giving up because she went through a horrible time with Dad and really didn’t want to see me end up the same way.”

If you or someone you know living in Canterbury or Wellington would like to join the trial, call 0800 318 167 or go to www.otago.ac.nz/zonnic

Teaching

Professionalism critical part of medical education

When you visit a doctor you want to know their medical knowledge is excellent.

But you also want to be treated in a professional and respectful manner.

University of Otago, Christchurch, staff are working on a leading-edge project exploring the meaning of professionalism and how it can be better incorporated into medical studies.

Every year, the University of Otago, Christchurch, teaches more than 250 medical students from their fourth year onward.

Professor Tim Wilkinson is the Associate Dean of Medical Education at the Christchurch campus.

“Professionalism means different things to different people and covers many things but includes things like being respectful, fully informing patients about procedures and always being on time for rounds,” Wilkinson says.

“In the past, professionalism is something we thought just happened. We are now looking at how to foster it in our doctors,” he says.

“It’s not something that one day you don’t have and the next day you do – it is something that is learnt through role models and through formal teaching.”

Wilkinson says one way to ensure this happens is to assess and provide feedback to students on their professionalism.

“There is arguably more pressure on doctors these days and we want to ensure that even when they are under pressure our graduates always maintain professionalism and treat patients with respect.”



Professor Tim Wilkinson, Associate Dean of Medical Education, teaches students about professionalism towards patients.

People

New Head of Department for Medicine



Lutz Beckert competes in the Coast to Coast endurance event.

The new Head of the Department of Medicine at the University of Otago, Christchurch, is a respiratory specialist who gives his own lungs a good workout at the weekend.

Dr Lutz Beckert is an expert in sleep apnoea, pneumonia, asthma and pulmonary embolisms, which are blockages of the main artery of the lung.

He is also a keen runner who has completed the Coast to Coast competition four times.

Beckert took up the position of Head of Department for Medicine at the University of Otago, Christchurch, in October.

Before this he worked for a decade for the Canterbury District Health Board as a respiratory doctor.

Beckert’s new Head of Department role involves overseeing research ranging from the genetics of heart disease to reasons for differing reactions to medication.

One of Beckert research interests is in the phenomenon of pulmonary embolisms, the condition which is often referred to as economy class syndrome because of its link with flying.

He is also passionate about teaching medical students.

“Doctor translates from Latin as teacher, I feel doctors have a responsibility to share their knowledge.”

Beckert’s enthusiasm is appreciated by the fourth year medical students he teaches.

He has several times been nominated as their favourite lecturer.

We’re going electronic!

This is the last University of Otago, Christchurch, newsletter which will be printed and mailed out.

If you would like to get an email version of the newsletter which updates you on what’s happening at the Christchurch campus, email: Kim Thomas, Senior Communications Advisor. kim.thomas@otago.ac.nz or phone on 03 364 1199

Awards

Distinguished Research Medal



Distinguished research medal: The director of the acclaimed Christchurch Health and Development Study, Professor David Fergusson, is this year's recipient of the University of Otago's highest honour. For three-and-a-half-decades Fergusson has been a driving force behind the internationally-recognised study, which has closely tracked the progress of 1265 people born in Christchurch in 1977. The University awards the medal for outstanding scholarly achievement. Fergusson will receive the award when he gives a public lecture next year.

Innovation

New X-Ray machine could save lives

A high-tech X-ray machine developed at the University of Otago, Christchurch, will let doctors predict a person's risk of stroke and heart attack by looking at the plaque inside their arteries.

The Heart Foundation has given University of Otago, Christchurch, researchers a three-year grant of \$134,000 to investigate whether colour X-rays could be used to save lives.

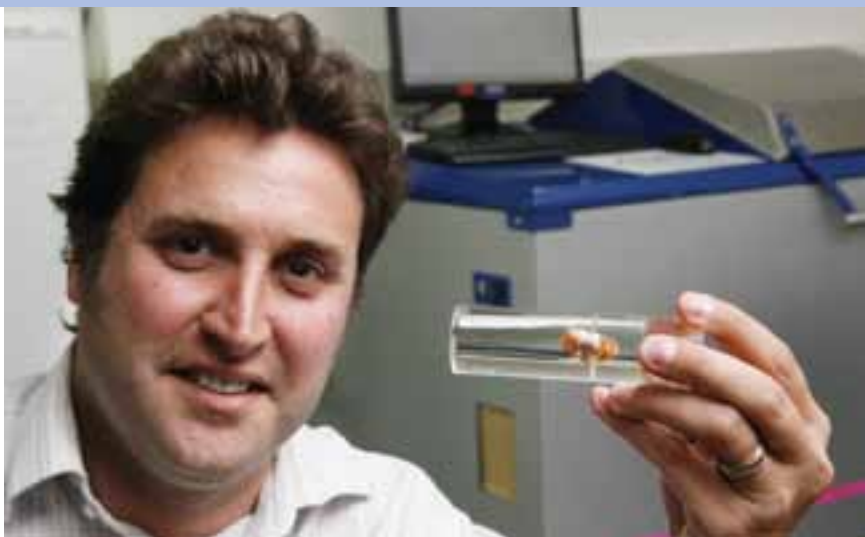
The study uses a revolutionary colour CT (computerised tomography) scanner developed by the University of Otago, Christchurch, the University of Canterbury and the European Organisation for Nuclear Research. The scanner allows radiologists to look at artery plaque internally. Previously, surgeons had to remove plaque to inspect it.

Unstable plaque can rupture and cause blockages leading to strokes or heart attacks.

The University of Otago set up a Centre for Bioengineering in both Dunedin and Christchurch earlier this year.

University of Otago, Christchurch, Centre of Bioengineering Director Anthony Bulter has been developing the scanner for four years.

He says it is exciting to see years of research in engineering and physics applied in a way which could save lives.



Anthony Bulter, director of the University of Otago's new Centre for Bioengineering with the MARS CT scanner he and colleagues developed.

“It is exciting to see years of research in engineering and physics applied in a way which could save lives”.