



CHRISTCHURCH
SPRING 2013

University of Otago, Christchurch Newsletter

Dean's Welcome

Welcome to the final edition of the University of Otago, Christchurch (UOC) newsletter for 2013. It has been an exciting year as we have moved back into our refurbished and strengthened main building after more than two years of staff and students working and studying from a myriad of locations during repairs. Beyond the main building we are still struggling with some ongoing building issues though. It was also great that we were again able to deliver our popular public health lecture series earlier in the year, after two years of earthquake disruption.

We were also delighted with the events surrounding our 40th Anniversary earlier in the year with highlights including the hanging of a Neil Dawson sculpture in the foyer, opening the Nicholls Clinical Research Centre on the ground floor of the main building and a 40th Anniversary dinner at Wigram. Despite being here for 40 years many of the public think we are 'just part of the hospital' and do not realise the extent of our involvement in undergraduate teaching of future doctors, in educating nurses and other health professionals at the postgraduate level, in broader postgraduate health teaching, and in the supervision of students undertaking health research on a wide variety of topics. In addition, our staff continue to undertake world class research, despite the low level of health research funding within New Zealand.

In 2014, as part of enhancing community involvement we are planning to have open days on a whole variety of topics. These will allow our staff and community groups to show off their work. Some weeks may be on specific topics such as heart disease, gout, mental health, breast cancer, bowel cancer, children's health, ageing, and orthopaedics. Other weeks may be aimed at postgraduate studies or future research students. When we have a final schedule, we will let you know. In addition, our Public Health lectures will again occur on Wednesday evenings from mid-February over a period of six weeks. Speakers will include experts on infectious diseases, orthopaedic surgery and heart disease, and other topics.

We are always pleased to get good turnouts at our events. We are also keen to get feedback on events which we have held, or on events you would like us to host, or topics you would like to hear about. Our aim has always been to create a healthier future by undertaking research and by education of future and current health professionals.

Regards
Peter Joyce

If you have feedback or suggestions on events or topics of interest, email kim.thomas@otago.ac.nz



did you know?

- We have about 600 postgraduate students, mostly health professionals such as nurses.
- This year 45 science and medical students will get a taste of research with our Summer Studentship programme.
- Thousands of doctors have done their final clinical years training in Christchurch.
- We are home to many excellent research groups such as the Christchurch Heart Institute, the Christchurch Health and Development Study and the Centre for Free Radical Research.

Medical professionals act up – in a positive way

Actors are helping Christchurch medical students practise the skills necessary to relate to patients.

Dr Lynette Murdoch organises the General Practice component for 4th year medical students at the University of Otago, Christchurch. She says the General Practice Department has long employed professional actors to play the role of simulated patients.

“The consultations our students have with the simulated patients allow them to apply their knowledge to realistic situations, and to practise the skills necessary to relate well with patients. The students receive feedback directly from the simulated patients.”

Simulated patients are people who pretend to be a particular patient with a particular condition. They can be actors or volunteers who are trained in order for the students to meet predetermined learning objectives.

The University of Otago, Christchurch educates medical students between their fourth to sixth and final year. Students move between different specialities such as general practice and paediatrics. They also spend time at the Simulation Centre, which provides a safe environment for them, and postgraduate nursing students, to practise clinical and professional skills. They make use of high-technology manikins and Simulation Centre director Dr MaryLeigh Moore is investigating the greater use of actors, as well as at some stage recruiting volunteers from the community.

Dr Moore recently returned from a learning trip to a well-established Australian programme using simulated patients and volunteers

She explains: “Volunteers – community members who are healthy or who have chronic illness – can contribute valuable learning opportunities to students by simply being themselves, and increasing opportunities for students to interact with a range of people.”

“Simulated patients bring consistency to their presentations and responses as opposed to the ‘real’ and varied responses and perspectives of volunteers.”

Dr Moore says the benefits to the students are very real and volunteers and simulated patients can also experience a significant sense of reward from contributing to the training of doctors.



Medical student Ben Thomson practises a consultation with actor Ayesha Cording.

More women injured in quakes

A Christchurch researcher is trying to understand why so many more women than men were injured in the Canterbury earthquakes.

Professor Mike Ardagh is Chair of the RHISE (Researching the Health Implications of Seismic Events) group.

Professor Ardagh leads a team investigating the health system response to the quakes. His team found the health system responded remarkably well to a massive event, including the activation of well-practiced plans and innovation to overcome issues such as loss of power. Looking at ACC statistics, they discovered that significantly more women than men were injured, across all degrees of injury.

“We have a few hypotheses about why this is but have not proven anything yet. We are working on this question in collaboration with Professor David Johnston of Massey University.”

Professor Johnston is studying how people behave during earthquakes and is probing whether certain behaviours, such as running or staying still, put some at greater risk.

Some of the other topics being explored by the RHISE group are:

- Variations in stress according to peoples’ homes or workplaces, and their exposure to quake damage.
- The impact on older peoples’ health.
- The impact on front line workers’ occupational health.
- The on-going psychological impact.

The gender and injury project will take at least a year and findings will be reported in this newsletter.



Medical professionals respond after the February 2011 earthquake.

brief

Recovering from food addiction

Professor Doug Sellman and his team from the National Addiction Centre have just been granted funding to trial a new treatment for those with obesity called *Kia Akina*.

“There is a serious need to develop new non-surgical ways of treating obesity because obesity-related diseases are expensive for New Zealand, traditional non-surgical methods are not working, and surgery is very costly,” says Professor Sellman.

Kia Akina uses a ‘food addiction’ approach to obesity. Professor Sellman says the project will test the feasibility, short-term effectiveness and participant satisfaction of *Kia Akina* within a primary health care setting.

If shown to be effective, *Kia Akina* will be developed as a non-commercial, low cost network for obesity recovery throughout New Zealand.

Public Health head practises healthy living



The new head of the campus' Public Health Section is a keen lawn bowler who has just returned from playing the sport in America.

Dr Gillian Abel took on the role earlier this year. She has worked for the University for more than 16 years. The Section is currently part of the Department of Public Health and General Practice but will next year split and become the Department of Population Health.

When she is not working Dr Abel enjoys playing lawn bowls at her local Beckenham club and has even played for the Canterbury province.

“My husband and I used to play badminton together and decided once the children had left we would take up another sport together. We walked into the Beckenham bowling club about eight seasons ago and became addicted.”

Dr Abel and her husband recently returned from a bowling competition in Orange County, California. She placed in both the singles and pairs divisions. In both her final games she lost to international players.

The Public Health Section runs postgraduate public health programmes, offering a Certificate, Diploma and PhD in Public Health to people with an interest in all areas of the health, policy, government and non-government sectors. In addition, they teach public health at an undergraduate level to medical students. The Section is involved in a variety of public health-related research with Dr Abel's interests being on research with vulnerable populations including sex workers, people living with HIV and young people who have been in the care system.

Dr Abel says she is really excited about her role at the University. One of her aims is to streamline courses offered by the Department to make it easier for people to study and work.

Māori Institute's innovation awarded



Staff and students of the University of Otago, Christchurch, in Darwin at the Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education (LIME) conference.

Christchurch's Māori/Indigenous Health Institute (MIHI) recently won the Australasian award for 'innovation in Indigenous health curriculum implementation' at the Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education (LIME) conference.

The LIME conference brings together all 20 medical schools throughout Australia and New Zealand, and hosts attendees from the United States and Canada.

MIHI director Suzanne Pitama says she and her team were thrilled to receive the award.

“As there is much collaboration between indigenous teaching teams at University of Otago's Christchurch, Wellington and Dunedin campuses, the award recognises the innovation of all these teams. It also recognised the systemic support within the University of Otago to prioritise indigenous health within the curriculum.”

MIHI oversees the Māori health component of the medical curriculum at the University of Otago, Christchurch.

Award nominees are judged on how well their teaching programmes demonstrate their commitment and experience to understanding and furthering the health of Māori and Indigenous peoples.

The award has been presented for four years, says Pitama. MIHI also won it in the inaugural year.

A review panel of academic peers and members of indigenous medical doctors associations judge the award, Pitama says.

Legionnaires' disease more common than once thought



Professor David Murdoch.

Infectious diseases expert Professor David Murdoch is passionate about his work in better understanding legionnaires' disease and its causes.

"If I ever have the opportunity in my career to help eradicate a disease it would likely be legionnaires' disease. It's the most common cause of pneumonia for much of the year in Christchurch and it has a far greater impact on community health and the hospital than people realise."

Professor Murdoch has just published research showing the potentially fatal disease is four times more prevalent in Canterbury than previously thought. He believes the results will apply to other centres and has sought funding to do New Zealand-wide research.

Professor Murdoch says special tests are required to diagnose legionnaires' disease because it looks the same as other forms of pneumonia on an x-ray and has similar symptoms.

It is important to know if a patient has legionnaires' disease as specific antibiotics are required to treat it which differ from the standard treatment for pneumonia.

Professor Murdoch says he and colleagues from the Canterbury Health Laboratories introduced a new strategy in 2010 whereby all samples from Canterbury patients with pneumonia were tested for legionnaires' disease.

"It's a very simple approach but we don't think anyone else has done this globally."

"We have more than quadrupled the detection of legionnaires' disease with this new strategy and highlighted a big spring/summer peak in activity that is more predictable every year in Christchurch than influenza. This peak is associated with gardening activities but the actual cause is not known."

Professor Murdoch is now studying Cantabrians who test positive for legionnaires' disease in greater depth to try and understand what specific gardening activities or other activities are implicated.

brief

Improving the treatment and experience for dialysis patients

Chronic kidney disease is common, affecting about 500,000 New Zealanders. It is important because it increases chances of heart disease and death and may lead to needing treatment with dialysis or a kidney transplant. Dialysis therapy is a heavy and costly burden for patients and their families and the health system. However, there is a lack of reliable evidence to improve patient outcomes.

Dr Suetonia Palmer has just been awarded a prestigious Rutherford Discovery Fellowship valued at \$800,000 over five years for research project called: "Improving evidence for decision-makers in chronic kidney disease."

Dr Palmer's research aims to provide rigorous overviews of existing research and participant-led enquiry to provide better and more useable information for clinicians, consumers and policy-makers in the field of chronic kidney disease.

brief

Chlorine bleach key in disease?

Professor Tony Kettle from the Centre for Free Radical Research has won a prestigious Marsden Fund grant to better understand a 'Jekyll and Hyde' chemical with a role in heart disease, cancer, cystic fibrosis, and rheumatoid arthritis.

Professor Kettle will investigate chlorine bleach's role in strengthening collagen by linking to form a resilient mesh. Without this mesh people can develop cataracts and an autoimmune disease that destroys the kidneys and causes the lungs to hemorrhage. However bleach can also have negative effects.

"Chlorine bleach should be viewed as a natural chemical with a Jekyll and Hyde personality. It helps us to fight infections and form strong connective tissue but also endangers our health during uncontrolled inflammation."

Professor Kettle and his team will work with researchers from Vienna and Budapest on the project.

Healthier
Future
Appeal

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www.otago.ac.nz/christchurch