



CHRISTCHURCH  
AUTUMN 2014

# University of Otago, Christchurch **Newsletter**

## Dean's Welcome

Welcome to the Autumn edition of our Community Newsletter.

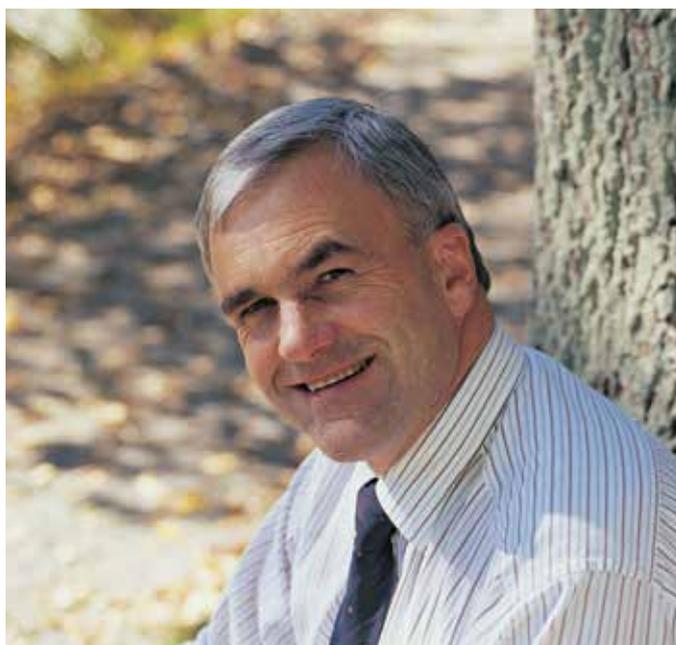
This year the University of Otago, Christchurch (UOC) has its largest intake of fourth year medical students, numbering over 100. Teaching staff have commented how impressed they have been with the friendliness, positivity and enthusiasm of this class. This can only be a good sign for the future of the health system.

A developing area in medical education is the use of Simulation Centres. UOC has an excellent Simulation Centre where future doctors and nurses can practise clinical and professional skills – such as taking blood or consulting with patients – before performing them in real medical situations. Recently Simulation Centre staff held a workshop where participants from our staff, the Canterbury District Health Board, private hospitals and the military were able to learn about and experience simulation as an educational method by creating and participating in simulated medical scenarios.

The Nicholls Clinical Research Centre recently celebrated a year of being open. It provides cutting-edge facilities for clinical research studies. An article in this newsletter shares some of the successes of the past year.

Our annual Midwinter Dialogues lecture series begins in May. This year we have invited politicians to speak about their vision and policies for health and research. Four Ministers or opposition spokespeople have confirmed they will speak. The series is primarily for UOC and health board staff, but members of the public are welcome to attend. Details of the series are at: [www.otago.ac.nz/christchurch/news/events](http://www.otago.ac.nz/christchurch/news/events).

Regards  
**Peter Joyce**



## Did you know?

- We have almost 300 medical students on campus.
- Our vision: a research-led campus with an international reputation for excellence.
- We have the best indigenous health curriculum of any medical school in New Zealand and Australia.

The Health University in Christchurch City

If you have feedback or suggestions on events or topics of interest, email [kim.thomas@otago.ac.nz](mailto:kim.thomas@otago.ac.nz)

## Searching for ways to ease children's pain

Rates of incurable Inflammatory Bowel Diseases (IBDs) are increasing in children and adolescents in Canterbury. This is against a background of very high disease rates in the region, especially of Crohn's disease.

Crohn's disease and colitis (collectively known as IBD) affect growth and normal development. Symptoms include pain, diarrhoea or bleeding, and can significantly impact schooling and normal daily activities.

The cause of these diseases, and why Canterbury has such high rates, is unknown.

With funding support from Cure Kids, Professor Andrew Day and his Paediatric Department team are running ongoing studies on children and adolescents with IBD.

Their goal is to make significant advances in treatment.

One project focuses on the patterns of IBD in children around the South Island. Other studies focus on treatments, novel biomarkers – or tests – for IBD, and assessment of the impact IBD has on the lives of children and adolescents at and following diagnosis.

To date more than 100 children have been recruited and will be followed over time.



*“Their goal is to make significant advances in treatment”*

## Christchurch heart disease test proven to save lives

A test developed in Christchurch which detects heart disease, and better directs chronic heart failure treatment, has been proven to cut patient deaths by more than a third.

The test and treatment strategy was developed by the Christchurch Heart Institute (CHI) research group in the late 1990s.

It involves measuring blood levels of BNP, a heart hormone which researchers identified as an important marker of cardiac failure.

The strategy was first tested in Christchurch and subsequently adopted in 10 other hospitals internationally.

Cardiologist Professor Richard Troughton and colleagues, Professors Gary Nicholls, Mark Richards and Chris Frampton have summarised all research studies on the impact of BNP-guided treatment.

They recently published this summary – or meta-analysis – which found that, compared to usual clinical care, the BNP treatment strategy reduces mortality in younger patients (those aged under 75) with heart failure by 35 per cent.

The strategy also reduces heart failure and cardiovascular hospitalisation by 20% regardless of age.

The research was funded by the Heart Foundation and the Health Research Council.



Professor Richard Troughton

## Brief

### Bipolar disorder

The University of Otago, Christchurch has a history of studying bipolar disorder. Professor Marie Crowe and colleagues are currently studying a new treatment approach aimed at reducing the need for hospitalisation and the number of mood episodes.

The study is examining interpersonal and social rhythm therapy in combination with medication to try to improve participants' quality of life.

# Clinical research centre celebrates milestone – and success, thanks to you

The Nicholls Clinical Research Centre has been open for a year – and is already helping researchers answer important medical questions, thanks to the help of the public participating in research projects.

The Centre provides cutting-edge facilities for research studies with a focus on cardiovascular disease and related conditions such as diabetes and kidney failure.

Before the Centre opened necessary tests for clinical research studies such as blood sampling and cardiac imaging (echocardiography) were done in small rooms in the hospital.

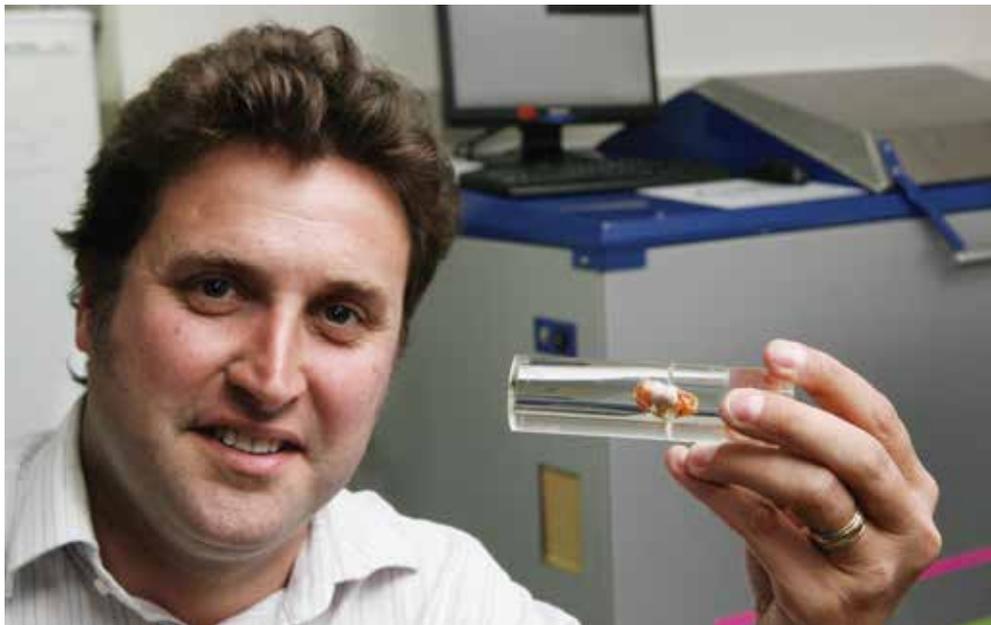
Centre manager Lorrain Skelton says over the years thousands of Canterbury residents have contributed greatly to health research by taking part in studies.

The Centre is a more comfortable place for participants to come than previous scattered research sites, Skelton says. Positioned at the interface between the University of Otago, Christchurch, and the main Christchurch Hospital building, it also provides a more convenient 'hub' for researchers and clinicians to meet and collaborate.



*Professor Gary Nicholls at the opening of the clinical research centre named in his honour.*

## Global partnership for ground-breaking research group



*Associate Professor Anthony Butler with a sample of cardiac plaque analysed by the MARS scanner.*

The Centre for Bioengineering has signed a partnership agreement with GE Healthcare, the world's largest medical technology company.

The agreement is to work together on ground-breaking medical imaging projects.

The Centre was one of the developers of the revolutionary MARS colour scanner which can provide images of bone, soft tissue, calcifications and injected contrast agents with much more detail than traditional imaging and MRI scans. The capability of this

scanner will result in early detection, diagnosis and treatment of major disease such as cancer and heart disease.

The financial potential of the scanner is huge as there are no scanners like it commercially available. The partnership with GE Healthcare will allow New Zealand to showcase its high-tech manufacturing capabilities on the world stage.

The Centre receives funding from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

# Māori focus in Christchurch medical education



Dr Suzanne Pitama

In 2001 Dr Suzanne Pitama's primary goal was to develop a Hauora Māori curriculum for Christchurch medical students that would raise their confidence and competence in working with the Māori community.

"When I first started teaching medical students there was Hauora Māori theory, but not a developed curriculum nationally or internationally that mapped how students might put this theory into practice."

More than a decade on, Dr Pitama has well and truly achieved that goal.

She is now the Associate Dean, Māori of the Maori/Indigenous Health Institute (MIHI) which oversees Hauora Māori curriculum and research on the University of Otago's, Christchurch campus.

Her teaching efforts have recently been recognised by both the University and the wider medical teaching community.

She and her team were awarded the Australasian award for 'innovation in Indigenous health curriculum implementation' at the Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education (LIME) conference in Darwin in 2013.

Dr Pitama was also awarded a Gold Medal in Teaching by the University of Otago, Christchurch. The criteria for this award is sustained, outstanding and excellent contribution to teaching.

Dr Pitama was also awarded one of five University of Otago teaching awards which recognise those who consistently demonstrate outstanding teaching skills.

## Brief

### New Zealand Medical Students' Association (NZMSA) conference

Medical students from New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific will gather in Christchurch for this year's New Zealand Medical Students' Association (NZMSA) conference.

The theme of the conference held in late-May is "Go Beyond". Speakers include Canterbury Medical Officer of Health Dr Alistair Humphrey and this year's Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year, Dr Lance O'Sullivan.

## Thanks

Thanks to those of you who came to this year's Public Health Lectures.

If you missed them, you can view them at:

[www.otago.ac.nz/christchurch/news/podcasts](http://www.otago.ac.nz/christchurch/news/podcasts)

Podcasts of the 2014 lecture series will be added over coming weeks.

Our website now has a Community section on the home page.

This is where you can find out about future events.

Upcoming events include lectures and displays on Coeliac Disease, Bowel Cancer, Arthritis and Breast Cancer. Get details at:

[www.otago.ac.nz/christchurch/news/events](http://www.otago.ac.nz/christchurch/news/events)

# Healthier Future Appeal

## Be part of Christchurch's healthier future

See how to foster some of the best and  
brightest students and researchers.

[www.otago.ac.nz/christchurch](http://www.otago.ac.nz/christchurch)