

# He Kete Kōrero



WELLINGTON

University of Otago, Wellington Newsletter | Summer 2018

## Dean's welcome

Tēnā koutou katoa

Welcome to the Summer 2018 edition of He Kete Kōrero.

This has been a year of major challenge and change and many achievements. In such a year, every one of you has professional success to celebrate. As you pause to reflect on this I thank you all for your outstanding commitment to UOW.

I also warmly welcome new staff, recognising that although many of you represent new parts of the larger University organisation, you are essential and welcome members of our UOW whānau.

Looking ahead, we have an exciting opportunity to bring advantage from change and secure even greater success in what we do. Giving just one concrete example, we have been able to secure more local marketing of UOW through our new direct connection to the external relations function of the University.

Our researchers have been recognised on multiple fronts, from NEXT magazine's Woman of the Year **Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman** to pathologist **Professor Brett Delahunt**, who has been awarded the Hercus Medal by the Royal Society Te Apārangi for his research on prostate and kidney cancer.

We are proud to welcome **Aiono Professor Alec Ekeroma**, the first Pasifika Professor in Medicine in New Zealand, as Professor and Head of the Department of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Women's Health. We also celebrate the appointment of **Associate Professor Anna Ranta** as Head of the Department of Medicine and **Associate Professor Lynn McBain** as Head of the Department of Primary Health Care and General Practice.

Congratulations to recipients of research grants from the Health Research Council and the Marsden Fund and the teams that support them.

I look forward to soon sharing with you our plans to celebrate the University's 150th anniversary next year. In the meantime, I wish you all a good break after a huge year. For those of you who are working during the break to support essential services in clinical and other settings, I thank you for this commitment to the service which is an important part of why we are here.

Ngā mihi nui

Sunny Collings  
Dean and Head of Campus



## Fellowship for cancer blood test research

**Dr Dianne Sika-Paotonu**, Associate Dean (Pacific) at UOW has been awarded a Pacific Health Research Career Development Award by the Health Research Council to research the development of a blood test for cancer.

Dr Sika-Paotonu will receive a grant of \$195,162 over two years as part of her Sir Thomas Davis Te Patu Kite Rangi Ariki Fellowship.

With collaborators, she will investigate the possibility of using circulating tumour DNA (ctDNA) – small fragments of DNA from tumours that enter the bloodstream – to test for cancer at an early stage in New Zealand, Tonga, Samoa and the Cook Islands.

Many tumours are picked up using biopsies but Dr Sika-Paotonu says this can be a significant barrier to care in Pacific countries where access to healthcare resources is limited and the cancer burden is growing.

“Sometimes it's not that easy to get to a tumour and take a biopsy. Most biopsies will require some level of surgical intervention, so *that* compared to a blood test is a very striking difference.”

The career development award goes some way to help her fulfil a promise that she made as a child.

“When I was little I promised my mother I was going to cure cancer – and of course, she keeps reminding me of my promise, so I've always gravitated towards cancer research,” she says.



## First Pasifika Professor of Medicine



(Left to right) Faumuina Associate Professor Fa'afetai Sopoaga (Associate Dean, Pacific, Health Sciences Division), Aiono Professor Alec Ekeroma and Dr Dianne Sika-Paotonu (Associate Dean, Pacific, UOW).

**Aiono Professor Alec Ekeroma** has been appointed to head the Department of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Women's Health at the University of Otago, Wellington.

He is the first academic of Pacific origin to hold a professorial role in an area of medicine in New Zealand – and also the first to head a University of Otago department.

Previously he was Associate Professor at the University of Auckland and has held many leadership roles in the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and with Pacific health organisations both within New Zealand and in the Pacific Islands.

Professor Ekeroma was awarded the chiefly Samoan title 'Aiono' by his aiga, or extended family group, in 2006.

Aiono Professor Ekeroma's area of expertise ranges across the fields of stillbirth, research capacity building, Pacific women's health, vitamin D, medical curriculum development, gestational diabetes mellitus and global health.

In conjunction with his leadership role at UOW, he has a clinical commitment to the Capital Coast District Health Board and a leadership role as founding professor of the School of Medicine at the National University of Samoa. He is the Chief Editor of Pacific Health Dialog and the Pacific Journal of Reproductive Health.

Professor Ekeroma says he is looking forward to building research capacity in collaboration with DHB staff and across the Christchurch and Dunedin sites.

"I will be working closely within the University and the DHB to address health inequities in access to care."

## Honours for Professor Brett Delahunt



Research For Life chairman Professor John Nacey (left) congratulates Professor Brett Delahunt at the Foundation's Annual General Meeting.

**Pathology and Molecular Medicine Professor Brett Delahunt** has received accolades for his research work from the Royal Society Te Apārangi and the Wellington Medical Research Foundation, Research For Life.

Professor Delahunt, from the School of Medicine and Health Sciences, was awarded the Hercus Medal by the Royal Society in October for his research on prostate and kidney cancer.

The Society said his scientific work and insight had been central to the development of an internationally accepted classification system of important prognostic markers for prostate and renal cancers.

In accepting the award, Professor Delahunt expressed his thanks to his many international collaborators for their support. "I am delighted that our various contributions to advance both urological pathology and men's health have been recognised by the Royal Society Te Apārangi."

Professor Delahunt has also been honoured by Research For Life, which awarded him honorary life membership and presented him with the award at its Annual General Meeting in November.

Chairman John Nacey said Professor Delahunt, who was chairman of the Research Advisory Committee from 1997 to 2017, had a long and productive association with the Foundation.

"We are indebted to Brett for his leadership of [the committee] and the thorough rigorous process he developed and refined for overseeing the process for reviewing and approving grant applications."

## Professor Tony Blakely awarded Chaffer Medal



Epidemiologist and public health researcher **Professor Tony Blakely** has been awarded this year's Chaffer Medal for distinguished performance in health research.

Professor Blakely is credited with helping to change public health policy and improving the health of the country's disadvantaged.

The Head of the Department of Public Health, Professor Diana Sarfati, says the impact of Professor Blakely's work has been significant.

"He has highlighted the socio-economic and ethnic disparities which have had an important role in driving the agendas of many governments."

Professor Blakely has been the director of the HRC-funded Burden of Disease Epidemiology, Equity and Cost-Effectiveness Programme (BODE<sup>3</sup>) since 2010.

## Woman of the Year

Professor **Philippa Howden-Chapman** of the Department of Public Health at the University of Otago, Wellington, stepped into a world of unaccustomed glitz and glamour when she was judged *NEXT* magazine's 2018 Woman of the Year at the Cordis Hotel in Auckland in October.

"It was like a mini version of the Oscars, but it was a very nice experience," she says. "I had to be persuaded to put my hat in the ring, because it was a completely different area from academia."

*NEXT* named Professor Howden-Chapman, who is the co-director of He Kainga Oranga, the Housing and Health Research Programme, supreme winner of the award for her long-standing crusade for healthy, warm, dry and safe homes in New Zealand.

She says the award is a very generous affirmation of the research which she and her team have been engaged in for many years.

"It is nice to get that affirmation from an area outside of academia. It makes me feel that we really are translating research into society."



## GPs elect new president

Dr **Samantha Murton**, a senior lecturer at Otago University, Wellington, has been voted president-elect of the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners.

She is just the third female GP to be elected president in the college's 45-year history.

As a GP in an inner city medical practice and a senior lecturer and trainee intern convenor in the Department of Primary Health Care and General Practice, Dr Murton hopes to build closer collaboration between the university research community and GPs working at the coalface.

"My university role will make those linkages a lot stronger and enable us to bridge the gaps."

Dr Murton is looking forward to being the public representative of New Zealand's GP workforce, particularly as the profession enters a time of change.

"General practice is at a crossroads," she says. "We are moving into a new era of electronic consultations and broader reach of healthcare providers in the community and more healthcare being delivered in the community and so I would like to see those changes go forward and be one of the champions of that."



## Marsden grant for men's mental health research

Postdoctoral fellow Dr **Sarah McKenzie** has been awarded a \$300,000 Fast-Start Marsden Fund grant to research the impact that dominant ideas about 'how to be a man' have on young men's mental health.

Dr McKenzie from UOW's Suicide and Mental Health Research Group says we still lack an understanding of why men are three times more likely than women to take their own lives and why young men in their early twenties have one of the highest rates of suicide of any age group.

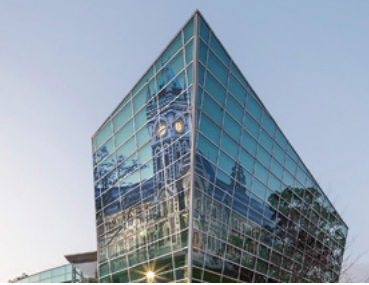
Her multidisciplinary study will be the first in-depth gender analysis of how the prevailing narrative on 'how to be a man' in New Zealand society affects the mental health related behaviours of young men.

The research project will use photographic methods to enable men to document their experiences of living with depression, anxiety and suicidality.

"The gender analysis of images and stories will provide original insights into how young men's mental health related beliefs and behaviours are influenced by masculinity, as well as how particular gendered places may help or hinder the ways in which men cope when going through crisis," she says.



# 150th anniversary



Next year is the University's 150th anniversary and we're celebrating! Beginning with the Burns Night Supper in January and a family-friendly picnic on the Clocktower Lawn in February, the year will be filled with opportunities to celebrate the extraordinary achievements of New Zealand's first University.

Commemorative events include a procession and convocation ceremony, an anniversary dinner, college lunches, concerts, rugby, a regatta, symposiums, a dinner and a ball – all designed to bring together friends, students, staff, alumni and our wider community.

A 150th Alumni event will be held in Wellington early next year, with details to be announced shortly. For further information visit [otago.ac.nz/150](http://otago.ac.nz/150)

## Memories from alumni

To help celebrate the 150th anniversary, we'd love to hear about your favourite memories from your time at Otago – your favourite course, the best thing about the campus, the friends you made, the things you did. Photos would be great too.

If you are happy for your memories to be shared on our alumni and the University websites, Facebook pages and in alumni online newsletters, please email them to [alumni@otago.ac.nz](mailto:alumni@otago.ac.nz)

Remember to include your name, degree, when you were at Otago and the word Memories in the subject line.

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## All new Public Health Summer School programme

Next year's Public Health Summer School has a bumper line up of 30 short courses on topics ranging from research methods to communication skills to highly topical issues in health.

It will run in Wellington from 11 February – 1 March and is expected to attract around 1,000 people from all over New Zealand.

Most courses are one day in duration and vary from small group computer lab classes to interactive workshops and multi-speaker symposiums.

This year's programme includes 16 new courses on a wide range of topics including machine learning for health research, the prioritisation of health interventions, emerging issues in Pacific health research and Hauora Māori foundations.

Highlights include an opening symposium on child well-being in Aotearoa, the southern hemisphere launch of the World Health Organization's International Housing and Health Guidelines, a major symposium on drug policy challenges, and a series of evening public lectures by international guests in conjunction with the University's 150th anniversary.

Early bird discounts are available for registrations before 20 December. For more information visit the website at [otago.ac.nz/uowsummerschool](http://otago.ac.nz/uowsummerschool)



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## Events

31 January -  
1 February 2019

### Cancer Care at a Crossroads Conference

This landmark event co-hosted by the University of Otago and the Cancer Society of New Zealand brings together the brightest minds in the field to develop a vision for long-term cancer control specific to the needs of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Venue: Te Papa, Wellington.

[otago.ac.nz/cancer-care/index.html](http://otago.ac.nz/cancer-care/index.html)

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11 February -  
1 March 2019

### Public Health Summer School

Early bird discount available for registrations before 20 December. Held at Wellington campus, University of Otago.

[otago.ac.nz/uowsummerschool](http://otago.ac.nz/uowsummerschool)

## In the news

A collaborative research project between the University and ActionStation gathered Māori perspectives on, and vision for, our justice system. The report, *They're Our Whānau*, was launched at the UOW campus in October.

### Other recent research news

Cycle lanes and walkways cut car use, reduce emissions, study finds

Sobering insights into alcohol marketing and Māori children

WWI cast a long shadow over New Zealanders' health, study finds

Increasing alcohol tax could benefit health and save money for society

Kiwis failing to slip into shade and slap on a hat for sun protection

Flavoured capsule cigarettes pose a threat to smokefree goals

Otago research aims to explain high testicular cancer rates in Māori

Researchers call for end to fat stigma

Education and support for menstrual periods needed at primary school

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For further details and more news check out our news page [otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/](http://otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/)

For upcoming events at the University of Otago, Wellington, check our events page

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