



WELLINGTON

He Kete Kōrero

University of Otago, Wellington Newsletter | Autumn 2019

Dean's welcome

Tēnā koutou katoa

Welcome to the Autumn 2019 edition of *He Kete Kōrero*.

Following the tragic events that unfolded in Christchurch in March, I have been reflecting on how fortunate we are to enjoy the tremendous diversity that we have within our academic community.

Universities flourish through openness to new ideas.

We share not just a willingness to entertain different perspectives from the wide variety of communities that make up Aotearoa New Zealand and which are reflected within our institution, but a hunger to do so.

My aspiration is for everyone to feel comfortable bringing their voice to our campus knowing that there is value in each of our opinions and strength in the discourse that the variety of our perspectives brings to our community.

It was with great pleasure that I was able to guide **Professor Paul Brunton**, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Division of Health Sciences, and members of the Executive of the Division of Health Sciences on a tour of the school in late March.

In this issue of the newsletter we celebrate the promotion of academic staff to positions of professor, associate professor and research associate professor and we take pride as always in the achievements of our students.

Ngā mihi nui

Sunny Collings
Dean and Head
of Campus



Library rainbows up

A rainbow arch greeted visitors to the Wellington Medical and Health Sciences Library in March to celebrate the school's diversity during Pride week.

The annual Pride Festival coincided with the city hosting the world International Lesbian Gay+ Association (ILGA) conference for the first time, providing even more reason for the colourful entrance.

Health Sciences Librarian **Kareen Carter** enlisted the support of husband **Kenny O'Brien** to construct a structural frame for the balloons using wooden dowel posts and curving PVC pipe. The 120 balloons, in colours of red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet, were then inflated with a balloon pump and tied together in bunches of four.

"The colour brought smiles to people's faces. We had really positive feedback on it."

She says that while the library may hold less in the way of physical books these days, it is still an important collaborative study area.

"It is very much a neutral space for people to work together."



Public health module prepares students for real world clinical practice

A new public health module being taught at the University of Otago, Wellington, makes use of active learning techniques to better prepare fourth-year medical students for future clinical practice.

The students now learn through a series of clinical and population case studies, with the emphasis on understanding the relevance and uses of public health in clinical practice.

Students practise conducting consultations with vaccine-hesitant parents, debate the ethics of doctors flying overseas for conferences in the face of climate change, learn to communicate the risks and benefits of screening, undertake implicit bias tests and advocate for population-level interventions with a former Member of Parliament.

Students are assessed on their ability to develop an in-depth understanding of how the 'big picture' determinants of health result in individual patients sitting in front of them in a hospital or clinic setting and to plan an intervention to improve population health.

All students also spend half a day helping out at the Wellington City Mission. The most recent group helped out packing food bags for Muslim families before sharing lunch with guests of the City Mission.

The work of reviewing the public health curriculum and planning a new module was initiated by senior lecturer **Dr Caroline Shaw**, who was joined in the work by fellow senior lecturer **Dr Amanda D'Souza** in 2018.

Dr Amanda D'Souza (second from left) with fourth-year students volunteering at the Wellington City Mission.



Cancer Care in the Spotlight

A ground breaking conference organised by the University of Otago, Wellington and the Cancer Society has led Health Minister the Hon Dr David Clark to promise to develop a draft national cancer plan by June.

The conference brought together 400 people from across the cancer control spectrum, from those affected by cancer, to primary and secondary care service providers, academics and policy makers.

There was strong consensus among participants of the urgent need for strong central leadership in cancer control, with 81 per cent of participants supporting the idea of a national cancer agency.

The conference, *Cancer Care at a Crossroads*, held at Te Papa at the end of January, was the biggest cancer planning meeting to be held in New Zealand since 1999.

It opened with a powerful call to action from Blair Vining, a Southland father with terminal bowel cancer, and his wife Melissa, who told Dr Clark the government had failed their family.

Data Driven

Mining statistics about New Zealanders' lives has become a whole lot easier for researchers and students at the University of Otago, Wellington, with the expansion of the school's Data Lab.

The lab opened in July 2016, with just three computers connected to the secure Stats NZ system. It has now expanded into the rooms on either side and has 17 computers available.

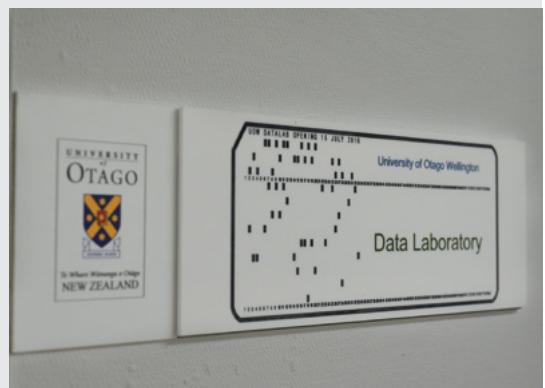
The facility gives researchers and students secure onsite access to Stats NZ microdata, including that housed in the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) which is available to support research in the public interest.

Working in the Data Lab enables researchers to run code, create datasets, store material and share it with other researchers working on the same project.

There are tight controls over the environment, and computers in the Data Lab cannot access the internet or connect to printers.

The new and improved Data Lab was a high point of interest on the tour of the Wellington school when **Professor Paul Brunton**, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Division of Health Sciences, and members of the Executive of the Division of Health Sciences met in Wellington in March.

To find out more about the Data Lab contact **June Atkinson** by email: june.atkinson@otago.ac.nz



(Left to right): Health Minister Hon Dr David Clark, Professor Diana Sarfati, Head of the Department of Public Health at the University of Otago, Wellington, and Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield at the conference.

Bumper summer student programme

The Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine hosted 19 students in the summer studentship programme this year, with the summer scholars taking on projects in cancer, medical education and penicillin research.

Students in the cancer team worked on projects related to the pathology and genetics of certain tumours, and the development of ctDNA technology for early cancer diagnostics. Their work was supervised by **Dr Dianne Sika-Paotonu** and **Dr Michelle Thunders**.

In the medical education team, students worked on the design of a genetics component to the MBChB curriculum and sought to understand more about wellness and arthritis. This group was supervised by **Associate Professor Diane Kenwright**, Dr Michelle Thunders and **Associate Professor Rebecca Grainger**.

Students doing research on penicillin focused on the reformulation of benzathine penicillin G (BPG), with the aim of developing a longer-lasting and less painful medicine for children and young people to prevent acute rheumatic fever and subsequent rheumatic heart disease. Their work in this area was led by Dr Dianne Sika-Paotonu.

One of the highlights of this year's programme was the record number of Māori and Pacific participants involved.

Students **Bridie Laing** and **Toni Anitelea** from the penicillin team and **Adam Fa'atoese** from the cancer group received Pacific Research Summer Student Health Research Council scholarships. **Esther Pinfold**, from the penicillin team, who was co-supervised by **Dr Sara Filoche**, received a Māori Research Summer Student Career Development Award Scholarship from the Health Research Council.

Overall, this year's Summer Studentship Programme saw 57 student participants and more than 70 supervisors work on a ten-week research project.



Pacific summer student takes prize

Fifth-year Pacific medical student **Bridie Laing** was judged overall winner of this year's summer studentship oral presentation competition.

Bridie investigated the reformulation preferences of children and young people who are receiving regular Benzathine Penicillin G injections for rheumatic fever prevention. Her work was conducted under the supervision of **Dr Dianne Sika-Paotonu**.

Bridie is the first Pacific winner of this prize.

She was awarded a Health Research Council Pacific Summer Student Scholarship to help her undertake the work.

The oral presentation prize was financially supported by the Dean's Department and the Division of Health Sciences.

Dr Clint Gray and **Associate Professor Rob Siebers** undertook the difficult task of assessing the final written reports. The top four were from students **Matthew Shum**, **Andrew Leighs**, **Joy Hu** and Bridie Laing.



Bridie Laing

Plaudits for tobacco control group ASPIRE2025

University of Otago research group ASPIRE2025 has won praise from the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand for exemplary efforts and achievements in the field of smoking cessation and tobacco control.

ASPIRE2025 Co-Director **Professor Richard Edwards** accepted the Thoracic Society President's Award at the society's annual conference on the Gold Coast in April.

He says he was particularly delighted to receive recognition from the Thoracic Society, which is one of the key organisations leading efforts to help achieve a Smokefree Aotearoa by 2025.

ASPIRE Co-Director **Professor Janet Hoek** believes the group's success demonstrates the power of multi-disciplinary mixed-methods research.

"ASPIRE researchers report on complex epidemiological studies and the breadth of our work allows us to offer crucial insights into the impact of current and proposed measures."

Anaru Waa, also an ASPIRE2025 Co-Director, noted that the group's work was far from finished.

"Major disparities in smoking prevalence persist and we need to increase our efforts to reduce these."



ASPIRE 2025 Co-Director Professor Richard Edwards accepts the award

Pedal to the Metal

A group of 25 staff from the Wellington campus collectively cycled an incredible 3,553 kilometres, the equivalent of more than twice the length of New Zealand when they took part in this year's Aotearoa Bike Challenge.

Overall the group had two podium category finishes, ending eighth overall in the Wellington region by size.

The national event sees workplaces around the country compete to get the most people to ride a bike for 10 minutes or more. Individuals and workplace teams earn points for each kilometre cycled, each day on a bike, and for each person they encourage to sign up.

The University's participation in the event was coordinated by the U-Owls group.



Some of the University's Aotearoa Bike Challenge cyclists Professor Tony Dowell, Phillip Kane, Dr Jenny Visser, Gay Dungey, Jaslyn Heaphy, Jude Ball, Jo Hilder and Dr Ben Darlow.

Academic Promotions



Three academics from the University of Otago, Wellington, have been promoted to the position of professor.

The new professors are **Jeremy Krebs**, an endocrinologist from the Edgar Diabetes and Obesity Research Centre with research interests in diabetes and obesity; **Alister Neill**, from the Department of Medicine, whose research interests include obstructive sleep apnoea; and **Lynette Sadleir**, from the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, who directs the Epilepsy Research Group.

The promotions were announced late last year by Vice-Chancellor **Professor Harlene Hayne**, who acknowledged the new professors' hard work, dedication and ability.

"These promotions highlight the regard with which the individuals, and their work, is held, along with the integrity of their leadership," she said.

A further three academics were promoted to the position of Associate Professor: **Rebecca Grainger**, from the Departments of Medicine and Pathology and Molecular Medicine; **Angela Ballantyne** from the Department of Primary Health Care and General Practice and **Maria Stubbe** from the Department of Primary Health Care and General Practice.

James Stanley, from the Dean's Department, and **Ricci Harris**, from the Department of Public Health, were promoted to Research Associate Professors.



Events

12 June

Inaugural Professorial Lecture by Professor Jeremy Krebs,
Department of Medicine
Venue: Nordmeyer Theatre, Wellington campus, University of Otago.

7 August

Inaugural Professorial Lecture by Professor Alister Neill,
Director of WellSleep Research Group, Department of
Medicine
Venue: Nordmeyer Theatre, Wellington campus, University of Otago.

18 October

Understanding and Managing the Late Effects of Polio
This one-day symposium is designed to educate people who have had polio and their families, carers and health professionals about the new and different symptoms that people who have had polio frequently experience 30-40 years after initially contracting the virus.
The symposium is being jointly organised by the University of Otago, Wellington and Polio NZ.
Venue: Wellington campus, University of Otago.

In the news

In an editorial in *Pacific Health Dialog*, the Head of the Department of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Women's Health, **Aiono Professor Alec Ekeroma**, discusses our collective response to racism and intolerance in the wake of the Christchurch attacks

otago.ac.nz/wellington/otago709139.pdf

Other recent research news

Housing WOFs need to be combined with education, study shows

otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/otago709447.html

Otago researchers encourage New Zealanders to support Arms Amendment Bill

otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/otago708948.html

Kiwi kids call for ban on junk food marketing

otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/otago708763.html

Otago researchers call for urgent law change

otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/otago707440.html

Liberal access to e-cigarettes likely to bring health benefits, NZ study finds

otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/otago706856.html

'Invisible wounds' may have cut WWII veterans' lives short

otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/otago706715.html

New WHO housing and health guidelines could save millions each year

otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/otago706037.html

Train station signs send weak smokefree signal

otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/otago705955.html

Surprise te reo Māori finding in pre-diabetes research

otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/otago705706.html

New Zealand leads global effort to control rheumatic fever

otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/otago705116.html

'Choosing Wisely' reduces unnecessary tests and antibiotic use, study finds

otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/otago703234.html

One plus one equals more than two for health expenditure in patients with multiple conditions, study finds

otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/otago702584.html

For further details and more news check out our news page

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

otago.ac.nz/UOWevents

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