

He Kete Kōrero



WELLINGTON

University of Otago, Wellington Newsletter | Spring 2019

Dean's welcome

Mālō e lelei

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

This year we have been looking to the future, while celebrating the University's 150th anniversary.

In July we opened our Pacific Office which will allow us to take our engagement with local Pasifika communities to a new level, encourage Pacific research excellence and demonstrate the University's leadership on Pacific matters. In September we take part in Tonga Language Week, Uike Kātoanga'i 'o e Lea Faka-Tonga, and I encourage you to add to your vocabulary some of the words and phrases shown later in the newsletter.

In August we were honoured to receive our long-awaited kākahu *Te Iti Kahurangi (The Most Treasured)* from master weaver Kohai Grace and Ngāti Toa Rangatira.

Depicting our relationships with mana whenua Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Te Āti Awa and Ngāti Raukawa, the kākahu offers a visual reminder of the importance of Te Ao Māori in our daily work. It will be worn as a symbol of the honour and trust we place in our students as they leave us to practise their crafts, and as a weighty, but protective reminder of the obligations that come with privilege.

Our goal is to change the world for the better, by showing that diversity and inclusion can only enhance our teaching and research, all of which is aimed at enhancing the health and well being of all New Zealanders, and reducing health inequalities for Māori, Pacific people, 'new' New Zealanders and an increasing cohort of less well off Pākehā.

Significant grants we have received from the Health Research Council of New Zealand which you can read about in this newsletter will play an important role in that work.

‘Ofa atu

Sunny Collings
Dean and Head of
Campus



Dedication ceremony for Kākahu

An authentically created Māori kākahu designed for the Wellington school was two years in the making, but was born five years before that in her imagination and heart, Dean and Head of School **Professor Sunny Collings** told those at its dedication and naming ceremony in August.

It was a huge honour and very humbling to be receiving the cloak from master weaver Kohai Grace and her iwi Ngāti Toa Rangatira, she said.

“The kākahu will be a constant visual reminder of the increasing importance of Te Ao Māori in our daily work, and of the privilege and obligations in our collective efforts as staff and students.”

The kākahu was named *Te Iti Kahurangi (The Most Treasured)* by all those who were present, as an act of tikanga Māori. The name is drawn from the University's whakataukī proverb ‘Whāia te iti kahurangi, ki te tuohu koe me he maunga teitei: Seek the treasure you value most dearly; if you bow your head, let it be to a lofty mountain.’

The kākahu is woven from muka (flax fibre) with a tāniko border honouring the relationship between the University of Otago, Wellington and mana whenua tribal authorities Ngāti Toa, Te Āti Awa and Ngāti Raukawa. Feathers from kiwi, kererū, tōroa, pūkeko, tūi, pheasant and kea adorn the top.

The cloak will be worn at important ceremonial occasions, including student award ceremonies and Inaugural Professorial Lectures.



Rautaki Hononga Māori (Māori Strategic Framework Project Manager) Toa Waaka and master weaver Kohai Grace place the kākahu around the shoulders of Professor Sunny Collings.

Major HRC funding for Wellington researchers

Researchers from the University of Otago, Wellington have won major project funding grants from the Health Research Council to investigate a wide range of topics, from the effect of climate change on people's health to closing smoking disparities, particularly for Māori and Pacific people.

Associate Professor Simon Hales and his team from the Health Environment and Infection Research Unit (HEIRU) have been granted \$1.2 million over three years to investigate the relationship between extreme rainfall events and water-borne gastroenteritis infections.

"In this study we will identify times, such as following heavy rainfall, and locations, such as communities using smaller untreated ground-water supplies where the risk of waterborne enteric disease may be increased," Associate Professor Hales says.

The co-directors of smoke-free research group ASPIRE 2025, **Mr Andrew Waa** and **Professors Janet Hoek** and **Richard Edwards**, have been granted \$4.95 million for a five-year programme designed to develop and improve ways to close smoking disparities, particularly for Māori and Pacific peoples. The major research project, Whakahā o Te Pā Harakeke, is a collaboration with Hāpai te Hauora, Kokiri Marae and ESR.

Mr Waa says working with different sectors, in particular from the Māori and Pacific communities, is incredibly important to ensure leaders at every level from communities to government have a chance to contribute.

"From a Māori perspective, we need to better understand what is causing smoking disparities to exist and what we can do from a policy perspective."

A second research project led by **Professor Hoek** will focus on developing strategies to support smoking cessation among roll-your-own tobacco users. The project, awarded \$1.2 million over three years, is a partnership with Hāpai te Hauora and will allow researchers to develop and test warnings and efficacy messages developed specifically for roll-your-own users.

Professor Hoek says New Zealand has among the highest rates of roll-your-own tobacco use internationally, with roll-your-owns causing particular harm to Māori, young adults and people experiencing lower prosperity.

In the Department of Medicine, the Te Ao Mārama research project led by Research Fellow **Bernadette Jones** and Senior Research Fellow **Dr Tristram Ingham** has been awarded a three-year \$1.2 million grant to conduct the first-ever national survey of disability in Māori.

Mrs Jones says disability affects around 32 per cent of Māori, compared to 24 per cent of New Zealanders generally, but even this figure may underestimate its true prevalence.

"The way we report the prevalence and impacts of disability is done from a western biomedical perspective that doesn't incorporate indigenous Māori perspectives."



Associate Professor Simon Hales.



Researchers at the launch of the Whakahā o Te Pā Harakeke project.



Bernadette Jones and Dr Tristram Ingham.

Innovative Young Minds visit CTP

A group of 40 Year 11 and 12 female students from all over the country visited the Centre for Translational Physiology (CTP) in July to learn about human physiology through a series of hands-on experiments supervised by staff and senior students.

The visit was part of the Innovative Young Minds programme run by Hutt City Council and Rotary Hutt City, which offers students the chance to experience science, technology, engineering, maths and high-tech manufacturing first hand.

At the CTP, students rotated around a series of four experiments: examining the effect of stimulation on heart rate and blood pressure; observing how

body composition can be captured through the centre's dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry whole-body scanner; doing sprints in the heat of the GENESIS environmental chamber to learn about exercise physiology; and understanding the neurophysiology of saliva production.

Scientific Officer **Dr Rachael Mason** says many of the young women were under pressure from their families to go to university but were unsure about their study options.

"Most had not thought of human physiology research as a career pathway. Giving them the opportunity to see different types of human research will hopefully help them on their science journey."



PhD student Ryan Sixtus from the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health discussing how temperature and other environmental stressors are known to affect blood pressure and heart rate.

Pacific Health Ministers welcome major report on cancer in region

A major research series on cancer control in small island nations led by **Professor Diana Sarfati**, the Director of the Cancer and Chronic Conditions Research Group and Head of the Department of Public Health, has been welcomed at the Pacific Health Ministers Meeting in Tahiti.

The series of five papers, published in leading medical journal, *The Lancet Oncology*, in August, was a major undertaking involving 64 authors in 27 countries.

Professor Sarfati says it is the first time that information from around the region has been collected together in this way.

“It is really the first time that Ministers have been able to see the magnitude of the problem.

“Many Pacific Island nations are unable to provide cancer care, with patients not receiving care at all, receiving restricted treatment only, or being treated abroad when health-care resources allow.”

Professor Sarfati says Ministers at the biennial Pacific Health Ministers Meeting responded positively to the recommendations made by researchers, including the idea of setting up a regional cancer centre to provide cancer treatment services.



Professor Sarfati presenting to the Pacific Health Ministers Meeting.

Pacific Office opens with milestone celebration

A formal ceremonial and multicultural celebration was held to mark the official opening of the school's first Pacific Office at the end of July.

The special occasion brought together Pacific community representatives, health, education and public sector leaders, church and community leaders, government leaders and members of parliament, Pacific nation representatives and University leaders, health professionals, and staff and students past and present.



Dr Dianne Sika-Paotonu (left) with Hon. Jenny Salesa at the opening of the Pacific Office.

Speakers at the opening included the Associate Health and Education Minister and New Zealand's first Tongan-born and Tongan-speaking Member of Parliament and Cabinet, Hon. Jenny Salesa, and the Minister for Pacific Peoples, Hon. Aupito Tofae Su'a William Sio. Opening remarks were given by the University Chancellor, Dr Royden Somerville QC, and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University's Health Sciences Division Professor Paul Brunton.

Guests were welcomed with a Mihi Whakatau led by **Toa Waaka**, the Rautaki Hononga Māori (Māori Strategic Framework Project Manager).

Associate Dean (Pacific) **Dr Dianne Sika-Paotonu**, who heads the Pacific Office, says the opening of the office acknowledges the strong and growing Pacific presence at the Wellington Medical School campus.

“It is also a physical space where staff can continue to focus on supporting Pacific students with their studies, with an emphasis on recruitment and retention, as well as the successful completion of their studies.”

Looking for answers on rheumatic fever

Rheumatic fever research team



A three-year \$1.2 million Health Research Council project to help tackle New Zealand's alarmingly high rates of rheumatic fever launched at the Wellington campus earlier this year. The project aims to develop an evidence-informed strategy to tackle the disease.

New Zealand is unusual among high income countries in still having rheumatic fever, with most cases occurring in Māori and Pacific children. Recent research from the school shows its incidence has not declined, despite a large multi-million-dollar prevention programme.

Project leader **Professor Michael Baker** says trying to combat such a complex disease is a huge challenge.

“At present, decisions on how best to prevent it are being made in the absence of complete knowledge on its causes and risk factors.

“It is a disease that is usually triggered by a Strep A throat infection, but the reasons why a small minority of people progress to rheumatic

fever about three weeks later is not well understood. Multiple factors appear to increase the risk, including household crowding and poverty.”

The project team includes epidemiologists, economists, immunologists, paediatric infectious disease specialists, cardiologists and experts on Māori and Pacific health. It will look at which interventions are likely to produce the greatest health and equity gains from the same health resources and which are acceptable to the communities most affected by this disease.

Professor Baker says the results of other HRC-funded research at the school will feed into the project, including a study on the role of skin infection in rheumatic fever and research on the efficacy of monthly injections of benzathine penicillin G for children following rheumatic fever.

Trainee interns as teachers

The University's Education Unit has run a series of sessions to help trainee interns develop their teaching skills ahead of taking on this responsibility as practising doctors.

Twelve trainee interns attended the first session, which focused on teaching clinical skills to fourth-year medical students and was led by Wellington Module Convenor **Dr Sam Murton**, Clinical Skills Director **Dr Sarah Rennie** and Education Adviser **Dr Tehmina Gladman**.

After the sessions, the interns conducted teaching sessions with fourth-year students and their performance was then evaluated by a member of staff and rated by the students.

Dr Rennie says she was inspired by the high calibre of learner-centred teaching offered by the trainee interns.

"There is immense value in the students being tutored by someone near their own age. The sessions allow the fourth-year students to expose their vulnerabilities and focus on areas where they need support. Often students are reticent about exposing deficiencies to senior staff."

Trainee interns can contact joy.rudland@otago.ac.nz for information on future training opportunities.



Fourth-year medical students Tessa Eyre (left) and Andrea du Toit (centre) with trainee intern Georges Tinawi.

Exploring invisible worlds in the lab

Primary school students are exploring invisible worlds in Junior Scientist lab sessions run by staff from the University's Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine.

The programme has seen more than 100 students engaged in experiments including extracting DNA from strawberries; examining cells and insects under the microscope; simulating vaccine responses; understanding blood transfusions and compatibility; growing bacteria; and looking at cheek and plant cells through the microscope.

The programme is funded by an Unlocking Curious Minds grant from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and is led by Senior Lecturer **Dr Michelle Thunders**.

Dr Thunders says the new funding has allowed the team to expand a previous programme which had been offered to primary and intermediate schools in Wellington.

"We are now aiming to provide three class sessions for 12 different schools in Wellington, Lower Hutt and Porirua by the end of November."

Dr Thunders says the lab sessions play a crucial role in getting children excited about science.

"Engaging young people in science at school is crucial in promoting the importance and relevance of science in their lives."



Pupils from Mt Cook School.

Events

20 September

From Evidence to Everyday: Translating nutrition research for a healthy Aotearoa

One-day symposium organised by the Edgar Diabetes and Obesity Research Centre. | Nordmeyer Lecture Theatre, Wellington campus.

otago.ac.nz/diabetes/news/otago710566.html

3 and 4 October

Māori Oral Health Equity Symposium

Hear from equity experts and sector leaders, and take part in workshops to shape the future of Māori oral health. Venue: Te Wharewaka o Pōneke.

oralhealthequitysymposium.com

8 October

Otago Spotlight Series: Mental Health showcase

Otago researchers outline their latest research on mental health. Free to attend, at the Nordmeyer Lecture Theatre, Wellington campus.

otago.ac.nz/healthsciences/research/forum/index.html

18 October

Late Effects of Polio symposium

Interactive sessions with expert speakers and consumers. Nordmeyer Theatre, Wellington campus.

otago.ac.nz/wellington/news/events/otago715663.html

15 November

Awards Ceremony Hui Whakanui Taurira

5pm, Nordmeyer Theatre, Wellington campus.

IN THE NEWS

Leading University researchers are part of a new group awarded \$2 million by the Cancer Society. The Cancer & Chronic Conditions (C3) group, the Health Promotion and Policy Research Unit, the smoke-free research group ASPIRE 2025, and the Social and Behavioural Research Unit have joined researchers from Massey University and Victoria University of Wellington to form the Cancer Society Research Collaboration.

For further details and more research news visit otago.ac.nz/wellington/news

TONGA LANGUAGE WEEK

Uike Kātoanga'i 'o Lea Faka-Tonga (Tonga Language Week) is being held in September. The theme for this year is: Fakakoloa 'o Aotearoa 'aki e Tauhi Fonua – A Tongan Perspective of Enriching Aotearoa, New Zealand.

To get into the spirit of celebrating Tonga Language Week, here are a few Tongan phrases and words:

Kohai ho hingoa? What is your name?

Ko _____ hoku hingoa - My name is _____

Ha'u o kai - Come and eat

Tauō 'o 'eva - Let's go for a walk

'Ofa atu - Best wishes

For more, visit the Ministry for Pacific Peoples' website:

mpp.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Pacific-Language-cards.pdf

For more information check out our events page at otago.ac.nz/UOWEvents and follow us on Twitter [@otagowellington](https://twitter.com/otagowellington)