



WELLINGTON

He Kete Kōrero

University of Otago, Wellington Newsletter | Spring 2020

Dean's welcome

Tēnā koutou katoa

Welcome to the Spring 2020 issue of *He Kete Kōrero*.

This winter we have been privileged to have been together on campus as we celebrate Matariki, the Māori New Year.

Matariki heralds a time of renewal and celebration, a reminder that the circle of life continues as we work through a global pandemic with all the challenges that entails.

I am inspired by the way our team of 1,300 staff and students have continued to do their best work while we face the challenges of rapidly refocusing our research efforts, switching to online teaching, learning to work alongside colleagues in a virtual way and living with budgeting constraints.

I thank all of you for your efforts to keep our campus running smoothly and for continuing to provide excellent teaching and produce world-class research as we adapt to the country's changing COVID-19 alert levels.

In this issue we pay tribute to our academic staff who have had their work recognised on the national stage and we celebrate the success of those who have won new funding from the Health Research Council for research which will make a difference to our world by improving health equity.

Ngā mihi nui

PROFESSOR WILLIAM LEVACK
Dean and Head of Campus



Celebrating Matariki

From swinging long poi to wielding taiaha, staff and students came together on campus during August for a series of events held to celebrate Matariki and the Māori New Year, *Te Mātahi o te Tau*.

The event included three lunch time sessions which gave participants the rare opportunity to learn new skills, from Te Reo card games to Māori martial art Mau Rākau to the graceful art of swinging long poi.

The sessions were run by resident experts **Jamie Yates**, Hauora Māori teaching coordinator/administrator, who taught Te Reo card games, **Toa Waaka**, Rautaki Hononga Māori – Māori Strategic Framework Project Manager, who led the Mau Rākau workshop and **Jeannine Stairmand**, Lecturer in the Department of Public Health, who demonstrated long poi.

Through late July and August, the Wellington campus has been privileged to have the *Ahi Kā* projection show screening in the lobby area. The projection, originally created for the walls of Te Papa Tongarewa, celebrates Māori New Year and tells the story of Toa Rangatira and his famed kūmara gardens, which helped sustain the Ngāti Toa people and surrounding tribes in the 1600s. The screening is particularly meaningful for our campus as it features staff member and actor Toa Waaka portraying his ancestor Toa Rangatira.



Staff practising long poi.



Toa Waaka leads the Mau Rākau workshop.

Team teaching award



Drs Amanda D'Souza and Caroline Shaw.

The undergraduate medical student teaching team in the Department of Public Health has been awarded an Australasian team teaching award for excellence and innovation in public health teaching.

The team, led by **Dr Caroline Shaw** and **Dr Amanda D'Souza**, was presented with the Council of Academic Public Health Institutions Australasia award for their implementation of a new way of teaching public health to medical students in 2019. The award was presented at the institute's annual teaching and learning forum on 10 July, which was held as a virtual event this year.

Dr Shaw says the new module is based on four clinical and public health 'cases' which introduce students to the concepts and practice of public health over the course of a week each.

"It is focused on helping students to understand how they can deliver public health as part of their future clinical practice."

Dr D'Souza says students have been impressed with the new way of teaching, with evaluations of

the course improving dramatically since the new module was introduced.

"We have received comments such as, 'All med schools in NZ should take up this approach to change the mind-set about public health.'"

The team is made up of Drs Shaw and D'Souza, **Professors Louise Signal, Richard Edwards** and **Nick Wilson**, **Associate Professor Simon Hales**, **Drs Keri Lawson-Te Aho, Amanda Kvalsvig, Ruth Cunningham, Melissa McLeod** and **Johanna Reidy**, and **Jamie Yeates**, all from the Department of Public Health.

Many staff from other departments have also contributed to the teaching and have been intrinsic to the success of the new module, Dr D'Souza says.

Further information on the new module can be found in an article published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*: [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(20\)30137-9/abstract](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(20)30137-9/abstract)

Queen's Birthday Honours

Academics from the University of Otago, Wellington have been named in the 2020 Queen's Birthday Honours list for services to health.

Professor of Urology and former Dean of the University of Otago, Wellington, **Professor John Nacey**, has been made a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (CNZM) for services to health and education.

Professor Nacey was appointed Dean and Head of Campus in 1998 and supervised a major building programme to improve the school's teaching and research facilities during his 10-year tenure. He oversaw the opening of the School of Radiation Therapy in 2001.

"I feel very honoured to receive the award, but I am also very aware of the large number of really talented people I have had the privilege of working with over many years, and who have in no small way contributed to this end result," he said.

Aiono Professor Alec Ekeroma, Honorary Professor in Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Women's Health and former Head of Department, has been made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) for services to health and the Pacific community.

Professor Ekeroma was the first academic of Pacific origin to hold a professorial role in an area of medicine in New Zealand and was first to head a University of Otago department when he was appointed in 2018.

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

Professor Ekeroma is now Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Samoa.



Plaudits for pain research

Dr Hemakumar Devan, a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Health, Activity and Rehabilitation Research (CHARR) at the School of Physiotherapy at UOW, has been awarded the New Zealand Pain Society's Broadfoot Trust Prize for 2020.



Dr Devan was awarded the prize for his research paper 'Media representation of chronic pain in Aotearoa New Zealand – a content analysis of news media', published in the *New Zealand Medical Journal* in January.

The prize is awarded by the Pain Society to promote and encourage education and training in the field of pain, research into pain mechanisms and pain syndromes and to facilitate the dissemination of new information.

Dr Devan has also been awarded the Pain@Otago Most Promising Emerging Pain Researcher for 2019, after being selected by an international panel drawn from the research team's international advisory group. The judges commended Dr Devan for his publication record, grant success and the focus of his work.

Dr Devan says the awards are an acknowledgement of a collective effort from mentors, collaborators and the community.

"The awards have boosted my motivation to conduct high-quality pain research to improve the lives of New Zealanders living with persistent pain."

EVENT

24 September: 5:30pm

Inaugural Professorial Lecture, 'Fast forward: journeys in Paediatrics and Diabetes', by Professor Esko Wiltshire, Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, Nordmeyer Theatre, Wellington campus, University of Otago. This event will also be livestreamed.

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Imagining bubbles



The creator of New Zealand's COVID-19 bubble concept, University of Otago, Wellington academic **Dr Tristram Ingham**, has been commended by Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield for his work on the country's pandemic response.

Dr Ingham, a Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Medicine, came up with the idea of the bubble as a way to explain social distancing

while providing advice to the Ministry of Health on the COVID-19 response for the disability sector.

In a letter to Vice-Chancellor **Professor Harlene Hayne**, Dr Bloomfield said Dr Ingham's work had been nothing short of outstanding, with the bubble capturing the imagination of both the Prime Minister and the nation and helping to frame life under Alert Levels 4 and 3 more positively.

Dr Bloomfield also paid credit to the work of Dr Ingham's collaborators, including his wife **Bernadette Jones**, a Research Fellow in the Department of Medicine, and their fellow academics, **Dr Meredith Perry**, a Senior Lecturer on the Wellington campus, and **Dr Brigit Mirfin-Veitch**, a Senior Lecturer on the Christchurch campus.

Dr Ingham was surprised and delighted by how widely his idea was taken up.

"I remember the first time I saw Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern say it. It was like, 'wow, she said it, our concept got out there.'"

Dr Ingham is grateful to the Vice-Chancellor, who gave the green light to the University's academic staff to assist the Government with the COVID-19 response.

Critic and Conscience Award

Professor Michael Baker from the Department of Public Health has been presented with a special Critic and Conscience of Society Award by The Gama Foundation for his extraordinary efforts to keep New Zealanders informed about the COVID-19 crisis and public health issues.



Emeritus Professor Pat Walsh and Professor Michael Baker.

Professor Baker joins lecturer and social worker **Associate Professor Anita Gibbs** from the University's Dunedin campus as one of two Otago academics to receive the award this year, the first time it has been awarded to two people.

Gama founder Grant Nelson says the judges decided to make a special award to Professor Baker for the outstanding contribution he had made in providing independent expert commentary on public health issues during the past few years, and notably during the COVID-19 crisis.

Professor Baker has also been recognised by Governor-General Dame Patsy Reddy for the invaluable contribution he has made to the pandemic response. At a function at Government House, Dame Patsy thanked Professor Baker for the independent, expert perspective he had been able to bring to the discussions around the response to COVID-19 and the future of public health infrastructure in New Zealand.

Major HRC funding for Wellington

Housing and Health Researchers



Researchers from the University of Otago, Wellington, have been awarded major Health Research Council grants to investigate the link between infectious diseases and long-term conditions, and to look at maximising the health and well-being gains from housing.

Professor Michael Baker and **Associate Professor Nevil Pierson**, both from the Department of Public Health, have each been awarded almost \$5 million for five-year research programmes.

Professor Baker's SYMBIOTIC programme will research the way that poverty, infectious diseases and serious long-term conditions, such as stomach cancer and diabetes, tend to occur together, known as 'syndemics'. Although the programme proposal was developed in 2019, its focus is highly relevant to combating the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Lead researcher **Dr Amanda Kvalsvig** says the team will work in partnership with communities, primary health care practitioners, Māori health providers and policy makers to create practical, effective solutions to break syndemic cycles and advance health and equity.

Associate Professor Pierson, **Distinguished Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman** and the Housing and Health Research Programme He Kāinga Oranga, a multidisciplinary group, will build on their previous

work to evaluate and scale up existing housing interventions that have proven to be effective. They will also test new interventions designed to increase equitable health outcomes and enhance New Zealanders' well-being.

Three other researchers from the Wellington campus receive HRC project grants of almost \$2 million each over three years.

Dr Melissa McLeod, from the Department of Public Health, will look at redesigning health modelling methods to take account of health equity for Māori, while **Professor Lynette Sadleir**, from the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, will examine genetic discoveries for unsolved developmental and epileptic encephalopathies. **Dr Caroline Shaw**, from the Department of Public Health, will investigate how transforming New Zealand's land transport system could improve population health and reduce inequities.



Professor Michael Baker and Dr Amanda Kvalsvig.

Spotlight on staff

Three academics from the University of Otago, Wellington have featured in a video highlighting the role that the University played in shaping New Zealand's response to COVID-19.

The video, 'Otago and COVID-19: Playing our part' features a selection of the University academics who have contributed to the country's COVID-19 response, including **Professor Michael Baker** from the Department of Public Health, **Dr Ayesha Verrall** from the Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine and **Ms Lesley Gray**, from the Department of Primary Health Care and General Practice.

Director of Marketing Services **Todd Gordon** says he wanted to acknowledge the efforts made by academics, staff and students.

"New Zealanders and our government turned to Otago in a time of need and our academics stepped up with great courage and leadership. They were truly incredible."

The video, which was shown on television and on YouTube, was created for Marketing Services by advertising agency Rainger & Rolfe.



Global success for eHealth summit

An eHealth summit to teach paediatric therapists to provide healthcare virtually has been hugely successful, attracting almost 10,000 participants from 30 countries around the world.

The summit, held online in May, was organised by student **Mindy Silva**, who is based in Nelson and studies by distance learning with the Rehabilitation Teaching and Research Unit in Wellington. Her PhD looks at supporting families with therapy programmes at home.

Ms Silva says when non-essential services were put on hold during COVID-19 lockdowns, paediatric specialists had to rapidly upskill in eHealth so they could support families from a distance.

Ms Silva's PhD supervisor **Dr Fi Graham** had earlier put her in contact with Canadian colleague, physiotherapist Dr Chantal Camden, who has similar research interests, and the two worked together with a small impromptu committee to organise the summit.

"Within eight weeks we had planned, organised and run an international four-day summit with 82 presenters from nine countries, covering topics that spanned the scope of paediatric therapy, from delivering services across the age span to legal and logistical issues, current research, technology solutions and supporting under-graduate and post-graduate learning."

Ms Silva says those who signed up for the free event included a mix of physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, orthotists, physicians, psychologists, parents, students and teachers.

"We closed the summit with a talk by Professor Peter Rosenbaum, the Co-Founder of the CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research in Canada, entitled 'Let's not go back to normal', embracing the lessons that this pause in service afforded us and looking at how we can use our new skills and experiences to improve services for our families."



Academic appointments

The University of Otago, Wellington has announced two new academic appointments, with **Professor Louise Signal** to take up the role of Head of the Department of Public Health and **Dr Sara Filoche** to become Associate Dean Research.

Professor Signal holds a PhD in social science from the University of Toronto and has conducted research in the field of health promotion for more than 30 years, including work in senior roles within the Ministry of Health. She has been a key member of the Department of Public Health for many years and is Director of its Health Promotion and Policy Research Unit.

In addition to her new role as Associate Dean Research, Dr Filoche will continue in her capacity as Acting Head of the Department of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Women's Health. Dr Filoche completed her PhD in Microbiology at Exeter University in the UK, and has worked in a wide range of roles since. She specialises in biomedical science, population health and genomic medicine.



Professor Louise Signal



Dr Sara Filoche