Prestigious international award for Wollongong toxicologist

Distinguished researcher and Dean of the University of Wollongong’s Graduate School of Medicine, Professor Alison Jones, has been awarded a rare and prestigious fellowship by the American Academy of Clinical Toxicology (AACT), cementing her reputation as one of the world’s leading clinical toxicologists.

The title of fellow, or FAACT, is awarded to less than 20 per cent of members, with Professor Jones, who is also Deputy Executive Director of the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute, to be inducted at the Annual Meeting of the North American Congress of Clinical Toxicology in September.

In the formal letter of appointment, AACT President, Robert S. Hoffman, said the fellowship was “a remarkable achievement and recognition by your peers of your outstanding contributions over the years both to the field of toxicology as well as to the Academy itself”.

Before moving to Australia in 2006, Professor Jones was Head of Medicine at London’s Guy’s and St Thomas Hospital and Director of Britain’s National Poisons Service where she advised the British Government on a range of toxicology issues, including the potential dangers of terrorist attacks using chemicals.

She has since served as a high-level toxicology adviser to NSW Ministry of Health and worked on several high-profile cases, including the Orica hexavalent chromium VI leak at Kooragang Island (Newcastle) in 2011.

She also advises the courts, this year assisting the NSW Coroner in the Roberto Laudisio Curti case, where LSD was considered as factor in his fatal heart attack after being tasered. She also worked with the Northern Territory Coroner in a case of suspected (but disproved) arsenic poisoning and currently sits on the Botany Bay steering group where she evaluates risks to the community from mercury and other toxins.

Professor Jones says she enjoys working on many of these cases because they support the community and help bring closure to families.

“I love toxicology because it uses first principles in everyday clinical practice – I have both a medicine and biochemistry background – and because of the variety. One day, it might be a chemical incident, the next an accidental poisoning, snake bite or overdose. I consider it a privilege to be able to assist people when they are down.”

Professor Jones is not only a toxicologist and Dean, but a highly-regarded researcher whose work has changed clinical practice. For example, with a group of collaborators, she recently identified the fact that, when patients admitted to hospital for sedative drug overdoses are discharged, they are at increased risk of being involved in traffic accidents; a finding that has altered advisory practice.
Professor Jones maintains strong, collaborative research partnerships with health and medical researchers around the Illawarra in areas as diverse as psychology and paediatrics and contributes to major health studies with researchers at the University of Sydney, University of New South Wales, Neuroscience Research Australia and University of Western Sydney, among others.

On the AACT fellowship, Professor Jones says: “It’s a wonderful recognition by clinical toxicology peers across the US and beyond about my contributions to toxicology teaching, research and clinical/advisory service. I am thrilled and honoured by the award.”

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About IHMRI

The Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI) is a joint initiative of the University of Wollongong and Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District.

IHMRI's goal is to foster, support and grow health and medical research in the Illawarra by connecting and supporting academic and clinician researchers around research problems of relevance to the region and the world. IHMRI provides research leadership, coordination, infrastructure and facilities to more than 550 academic and clinical researchers throughout the region.