Welcome

Welcome to this, our first ever issue of IHMRI News, a snapshot of health and medical news and events in the Illawarra. With feedback from our readership we aim to make this quarterly newsletter as relevant as possible, so please do pass on your comments.

For a relatively new organisation IHMRI has already come a long way. Among other achievements we have put together a strong operations team – absolutely critical to a successful research effort – secured the first three years’ funding (thanks to Illawarra Technology Corporation), been awarded a NSW Government infrastructure grant through the Medical Research Support Program, and taken major steps in ‘bedding down’ our key research themes.

As these research themes mature, sub-themes are being identified which will allow small and focused groups to make progress on specific issues of importance. In tandem with this, our research leadership team is growing.

The IHMRI Research Network, launched in December last year, has already had a phenomenal response not only in terms of the number of people signing up, but also in terms of the diversity of professions and disciplines represented (see ‘Your network – an update’ on page 6).

The Network is all about facilitating collaboration between academic researchers, clinicians and others in the community and we have already seen a wonderful example of what can be achieved through such collaboration in the ‘REACH out in dementia’ project, an 18-month project focused on palliative care in aged care facilities which recently attracted $600K of federal government funding (see ‘Research Spotlight’ on page 5). I am certain this is the first of many such successes and feel we will see the Network model work extremely well over time.

The next few months will be a particularly busy and exciting time for IHMRI, with its new $30m headquarters on target to open mid-year. The building is very impressive, with an entire floor dedicated to clinical trials as well as two floors of laboratories, and I believe it will provide researchers with exactly the environment needed to carry out successful and collegiate research.

IHMRI is in great shape for the future, and all of us involved have much to look forward to.

Prof Don Iverson,
IHMRI Executive Director

If you have colleagues who may be interested, please pass on this newsletter and invite them to join the IHMRI Research Network at ihmri.uow.edu.au/network
Announcements

New statistical service for clinicians
IHMRI is pleased to announce that it will be running a statistics clinic for use by medical professionals at Wollongong Hospital. Advice relating to the design and analysis of clinical research will be provided by Dr Marijka Batterham, Director of the Statistical Consulting Service at the University of Wollongong. The clinic will run fortnightly on Tuesdays (2-4pm). For further information please contact Rebecca Ciocca, Phone 4253 4813; email rwhitey@uow.edu.au

IHMRI planning forum held
A planning forum was held in February to discuss strategies for IHMRI’s future. A total of 40 representatives of SESIAHS, UOW and community organisations met to discuss strategic research areas, how best to facilitate academic, clinician and community collaboration, and how to target resources to support collaborative translational research. The outcomes of the forum have been incorporated in a Draft Strategic Framework, which is currently under review.

Reminders
Australian Research Commission (ARC) linkage infrastructure, equipment and facilities grant submissions are due on Wed 12 May 2010 (see www.arc.gov.au for details).

Who’s Who?
You may not have had the opportunity to meet many people at IHMRI yet, so here is a snapshot of our leadership team to help put names to faces (or faces to names).

The IHMRI research leadership model has been developed with collaboration in mind. It promotes strong links between academic and clinical research contexts, and supports research agendas focused on improving clinical practice and health outcomes.

Research leaders for each of IHMRI’s six key themes include a Scientific Director (academic researcher) and a Medical Director (clinician). Each of the three cross-cutting themes has one Director.

You will find more information, including a photo and brief biography of each of our research directors, on the research pages of IHMRI’s website: ihmri.uow.edu.au/research

Pictured L to R:
Sue Baker-Finch (COO);
Prof Mark Walker (ex-Infectious Diseases);
Prof Xu Feng Huang (Metabolic Conditions - MC);
Prof Linda Tapsell (Nutrition);
Prof Stephen Lillicoja (Human Genetics);
Prof Mark Wilson (Healthy Ageing - HA);
Prof Tony Worsley (Population Health);
A/Prof Marie Ranson (Cancer Continuum - CC);
Clin Prof Robert Moses (MC);
Clin Prof Philip Clingan (CC);
Clin Prof Jan Potter (HA);
Prof Don Iversion (IHMRI Exec Dir);
Clin Prof Will Yeo (IHMRI Deputy Exec Dir;
Med Dir Clinical Research and Trials Unit).
Congratulations

Congratulations to the region’s health and medical researchers who have had a number of major achievements recently.

New detector to improve radiotherapy

A collaboration between Prof Anatoly Rozenfeld and his team at the UOW’s Centre for Medical Radiation Physics and the medical physics department at the Illawarra Cancer Care Centre, Wollongong Hospital, has led to the development of a new ‘silicon strip detector’ that allows radiation dosages to be measured more precisely than ever before, improving the quality of radiotherapy delivered to patients. Part of IHMRI’s ‘Cancer Continuum’ theme, the research was recently selected by World Medical Physics Web as a ‘Latest News’ feature, sparking immediate interest from companies interested in commercialisation.

Motion capture suit seminar

Prof Fazel Naghdy and Dr David Stirling from the UOW’s School of Electrical, Computer and Telecom Engineering gave a fascinating seminar in February to demonstrate their new ‘motion capture suit’ (pictured), used to capture full body data in order to track and analyse multi-dimensional dynamic movements of the body in various contexts. Following the seminar, titled ‘Inertial balancing and motion capture, analysis and recognition’, a number of research collaborations are being explored that involve the application of this technology in the sporting and rehabilitation contexts. For more information please contact Dr David Stirling, stirling@uow.edu.au

Grant successes

A/Prof Victoria Traynor, Prof Patrick Crookes, Luke Oborn and Richard Fleming (Dementia Training Study Centre, Hammond Care Group and UnitingCare Ageing)
Federal Government funding: $2.2m over 3.5 years
DTSC promotes dementia studies in Australian curricula, provides tertiary dementia career pathways and delivers training for health professionals

Prof Jan Potter, A/Prof Brin Grenyer and Prof Nagesh Pai (IHMRI)
Department of Health and Ageing grant: $545,461 over 18 months
‘REACH out in Dementia - Recognise End-of-life and Care Holistically’

Prof Anatoly Rozenfeld, Dr Michael Lerch and Dr Marco Petasecca (UOW)
NHMRC Development Grant: $523,500 over 3 years
‘BrachyVision: a multipurpose probe for in-body radiation imaging and dosimetry’

Prof Mark Walker (UOW)
NHMRC Development Grant: $483,600 over 3 years
‘Preclinical studies of group A streptococcal vaccine candidates’

Prof Julie Steele, Dr Bridget Munro and Prof Sandra Jones (UOW)
National Breast Cancer Foundation grant: $260,750 over 2 years
‘Building better bras for women living with a diagnosis of breast cancer’

A/Prof Tony Okely, Dr Dylan Cliff and Dr Rachel Jones (UOW)
National Heart Foundation Grant-in-Aid: $125,635 over 2 years
‘Validity of energy expenditure equations in pre-school children: a whole body calorimeter study’

Dr Dylan Cliff (UOW)
National Heart Foundation: 2-year Postdoctoral Fellowship
‘Relationships between physical activity, sedentary behaviour, and cardiovascular disease and diabetes risk factors among overweight and obese children’

Prof Xu Feng Huang and Dr Chao Deng (UOW)
NHMRC Project grant: $399,250 over 3 years
‘Prevention and treatment of drug induced obesity, a common side effect of schizophrenia therapy’

Mei Han (UOW PhD student)
NHMRC Training (Postdoctoral) Fellowship: $318,600
Collaboration with Beijing Huilongguan Hospital in China to explore the link between the neuregulin-1 gene and schizophrenia
A Short History of IHMRI

When and how did IHMRI begin, and why was it established? Read on to find out more of the vision behind this organisation and some of the major milestones in its development.

For almost two decades, nursing and allied health programs have been on offer in the Illawarra, through clinical education programs offered by the University of Wollongong (UOW) in areas such as nursing, midwifery, psychology, exercise science/rehabilitation and nutrition/dietetics. Later, programs in medicine and medical radiation physics were added and in 2007, the Graduate School of Medicine (GSM) welcomed its first cohort of students.

The creation of the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI) in April 2008 as a partnership between the UOW and South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Service (SESIAHS) represented the next step in building a healthier Illawarra community.

UOW and SESIAHS already had a history of collaboration through joint research projects and student placements, and in 2006 had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to form the ‘Illawarra Health and Medical Research Hub’.

In establishing IHMRI, its partners recognised that the most significant drivers of its success would be its ability to maximise funding for health and medical research in the Illawarra, build research capacity, and implement programs in the community that improved the health of residents.

In 2008 a contribution of $15m from the NSW government was matched by $15m from UOW to allow construction of IHMRI’s headquarters to begin on the University’s main campus (pictured in three stages of completion). The Institute’s executive and research leadership team was appointed and its research themes began to take shape during 2009.

A donation from the Illawarra Technology Corporation of $6m in May 2009 secured funding for the first three years of IHMRI’s operations, and a further $680k was received through the 2009-2010 NSW Government’s medical research support program, providing essential infrastructure funding.

The IHMRI Research Network was launched in December 2009, providing the mechanism to connect health and medical professionals, academic researchers and community organisations around collaborative research initiatives, thereby building research capacity in the region.

2010 is shaping up to be a big year, with IHMRI’s new headquarters and state-of-the-art research facilities on target to open mid-year. It’s history in the making – we hope you join us for the journey.

Timeline in a nutshell

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<td>MOU signed</td>
<td>GSM opens</td>
<td>IHMRI established</td>
<td>Research leadership, themes and network take shape</td>
<td>HQ opens</td>
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A new collaborative research project involving Area Health Service clinicians, University of Wollongong researchers and aged care facilities has been awarded a $600K grant from the Department of Health and Ageing.

The 18-month project is called ‘REACH out in dementia – Recognise End of life And Care Holistically’ and will focus on providing training and resources for staff of residential aged care facilities caring for patients with late stage dementia.

Lead investigator and Clinical Director for the Southern Hospitals’ Network Aged Care, Community Health and Chronic Care stream, Jan Potter, says there is a severe shortage of geriatricians in the health service and resources are stretched in providing care for the growing number of elderly patients with neurodegenerative conditions.

The REACH project was initiated by palliative care physician Dr Roger Cole, who Clin Prof Potter says approached her just before retiring to suggest they try to set in place something sustainable that could help address this issue.

“With a decent time frame, substantial amount of money and good geographical coverage, this project offers the opportunity to bring about a really positive and lasting change,” says Clin Prof Potter.

The project will bring together a range of professionals with expertise in psychology, palliative care and aged care to develop a ‘tool kit’ for residential aged care facility staff, including treatment guidelines as well as examples of different plans of action that may be implemented in response to certain scenarios.

“The outcomes I’d like to see are a set of really useful resources and some models of care, leading to an improved quality of life for patients and their families and a reduced rate of admissions of elderly patients to emergency departments,” says Clin Prof Potter.

University of Wollongong psychologist Brin Grenyer, co-investigator on the grant, says he is excited to be working on the collaborative project, which he describes as “an example of how the IHMRI model can be very powerful.”

“This is an opportunity to train people to recognise when palliative care is the most appropriate option and provide holistic care,” says Assoc Prof Grenyer. “An important component will be to help aged care staff deal with their own feelings around mortality so they are better equipped to make decisions that are in the best interests of the patient and their family.”

“My hope is that the resources we develop will be useful across the aged care sector in the Illawarra, and ultimately across Australia.”

The Illawarra will soon be in a stronger position to make medical progress, to the benefit of all who live in the region. Critical to medical progress is clinical research and the cornerstone of clinical research is clinical trials, such as those carried out to test a new treatment in patients with a particular disease or disorder.

Globally, the clinical trials industry is worth in the vicinity of $10 billion. While running a clinical trial in Australia is cheaper than in many other western countries, it is significantly more expensive than conducting a trial in Asia, South America and Eastern Europe and there has been a clear shift of commercial trials to these markets in recent years.

However, the number of investigator-led trials is steadily growing in Australia. National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) data shows that 1062 trials were registered in 2009 and that one in four Australian studies are being carried out in NSW. In the Illawarra, clinical studies under way include those in the fields of cancer, diabetes, cardiology, kidney diseases, arthritis and pain management.

In the past, clinical research in the Illawarra has tended to be isolated and in need of better infrastructure. The opening of IHMRI’s new Clinical Research and Trials Unit (CRTU) in mid-2010 will significantly improve this situation. The CRTU will operate from a dedicated, purpose-built facility within the new IHMRI building and will have the facilities to conduct a range of trials as well as provide support for external trials where requested.

While many clinical studies will continue to be carried out in the region’s local hospitals and private clinics, the CRTU will provide an important resource for trials that don’t require an inpatient setting. The facility will offer considerable advantages as a space dedicated to research rather than clinical service, with its own allocated budget, personnel, resources, project management and administrative support.

At the same time as supporting clinicians already doing research to expand their activities, the CRTU will offer the opportunity for others to be involved in clinical research for the first time. And importantly for the economy, the Unit stands to attract new business to the Illawarra by providing new jobs and a unique, regional ‘one-stop shop’ for organisations looking to run clinical trials.
Your Network - An Update

Since the launch of the IHMRI Research Network on 9 December 2009 (pictured right) there has been a fantastic response from the health and medical community, with more than 360 professionals signing up for membership.

As of 19 March 2010, Network membership stood at 264 Members/Collaborators, 85 Individual Associates and 22 Organisation Associates. Those registering for the Network represent a broad range of professions – from specialist clinicians to health service managers to academic researchers – as well as a range of organisations, from public hospitals to private clinics, community organisations to universities.

The pie chart below shows the approximate breakdown of membership by profession (NB: this data refers to Members and Collaborators).

For more information or to register please go to ihmri.uow.edu.au/network

IHMRI Central – your online forum

If you have registered as a Member or Collaborator (i.e. you are active in research) check out IHMRI Central, our online community for IHMRI researchers. This is where you will find all IHMRI research theme-specific news, documents and events.

The blog has been set up as an online forum, allowing you to post your own news, requests and comments for others to read and respond to – so please do contribute. Go to http://it-innovation.uow.edu.au/pilot/ihmrihub

Coming up

Tues 27 April, 6.00 pm – 7.00 pm
IHMRI Seminar: Multiple Sclerosis and other diseases of unknown origin: are viruses the cause?
Prof Julian Gold, IHMRI Infectious Diseases theme; World Health Organization and Albion Street Clinic, Sydney
Lecture Theatre 2, Building 20, University of Wollongong
RSVP ihmri-admin@uow.edu.au

Wed 2 June, 5.30 pm – 7.30 pm
IHMRI Networking evening
City Beach Function Centre
RSVP ihmri-admin@uow.edu.au

Thurs 10 June, 12.30 pm – 1.30 pm
IHMRI Guest Speaker: Dr Mark Gasson, Cybernetic Intelligence Research Group, University of Reading, UK
Details TBC - further information will be sent out at a later date

Profile of a Network Member

David Holloway

Where are you working?
I’m a Registered Nurse employed as a Clinical Operations Coordinator with Medibank Health Solutions in Wollongong. We provide health management programs ranging from health coaching for health risk factors through to hospital substitution and pregnancy support. My role focuses on clinical governance initiatives for the more than 50 health professionals who provide telephonic and online health management services.

What are your research interests?
I’m really interested in ‘online therapy’: the opportunities and challenges of using emerging technologies to provide support remotely. Linked to this, I’m also very interested in the role of addiction, mental health and online behaviour. There’s some great work being done both locally and internationally in the area and I’d love to play a role in expanding that knowledge base. The role of new technology as an adjunct to health professional training is also something I follow closely, particularly the use of virtual environments for training simulation and decision-making.

Are you involved in health and medical research, or have you been in the past?
Part of my work involves looking at health data and clinical outcomes after telephone and online intervention, to ensure our health professionals get feedback on the impact they’re having. During my postgraduate studies I’ve done some research on reasons for cessation of drug use by young men, utilising a hermeneutic (interpretive) framework.

What led you to join the IHMRI Network?
My manager attended an IMHRI event in late 2009 and was immediately impressed at the scope of IMHRI and what it hopes to achieve. Over the past year I’ve met a few other IMHRI members and can see its strength in promoting collaborations.

What would you hope to come out of your involvement in the Network?
I’m hoping to meet other health professionals, researchers and educators who are interested in collaboration opportunities. I’m also looking forward to using the information shared through the network to enhance the support I’m able to give to the health professionals I work with.