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IHMRI welcomes UOW VC to its board

IHMRI is pleased to announce that University of Wollongong (UOW) Vice Chancellor, Professor Paul Wellings, has joined the IHMRI Ltd Board of Directors, replacing retired UOW Vice Chancellor, Professor Gerard Sutton.

The IHMRI Board sets the strategy and policy directions of IHMRI, approves its annual business plan and budget and also monitors and reviews the performance and conduct of the institute, among other things.

The board currently comprises three persons nominated by each of its members; those being the UOW, the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) and a Community Director (Chair) who is an independent member of the community with a demonstrated interest and capacity to act in the general interests of the community.

IHMRI’s current board members are:

- Professor Paul Wellings - Vice Chancellor, UOW
- Professor Denis King - Chair, ISLHD Board
- Professor Judy Raper - Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research), UOW
- Sue Browbank - General Manager, ISLHD
- Damien Israel - Deputy Vice Principal (Finance and IT), UOW
- Henry Kornacki - Director of Finance, ISLHD
- Community Director (Chair) - Vacant

IHMRI Research Network members will have the opportunity to hear Professor Wellings’ views on future directions for health and medical research in the region at a networking event planned for 13 June. An invitation will be emailed soon.

IHMRI gives birth to a new study

The Wollongong Birth Cohort Study is a new multi-disciplinary study that will examine the mental, physical and social health and wellbeing of Illawarra residents from childhood to adulthood (parents) and older adulthood (grandparents and potentially great-grandparents).

It has been funded by IHMRI to address a gap in our knowledge about the long-term health of the community.

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“There are few longitudinal studies of this type,” says project officer, Michelle Townsend. “It is important as it will enable us to identify the health needs (mental and physical) across three generations and is the first step to building the evidence-base to inform the development of prevention and management strategies that will ultimately improve the health and wellbeing of the community.”

From the University of Wollongong, the chief investigators are Professor Brin Grenyer, Associate Professor Chris Georgiou, Associate Professor Vicki Flood and Associate Professor Peter Caputi. They will work alongside a team of co-investigators from the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) and the university.

The first phase of the study is a pilot to establish sensible and feasible research links between the ISLHD and the university in the areas of prenatal and antenatal health, nutrition and wellbeing, with a focus on women in early pregnancy.

For further information, or to express an interest in participation, contact Michelle on 02 4298 1304 or michelle_townsend@uow.edu.au.

Wollongong Birth Cohort Study project officer Michelle Townsend completed a PhD examining educational outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care at the Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University, in 2011.

Wollongong Hospital redevelopment

Following years of planning and community consultation, phase one of Wollongong Hospital’s redevelopment, which includes the expansion of the Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Cancer Care Centre (IRCCC) and the Elective Surgical Services Centre, has commenced with diversions in place on the hospital campus until further notice.

While staff and visitors may be temporarily inconvenienced, the capital improvement program being undertaken by the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) between now and 2015 will significantly improve health services in the region. They include:

- the establishment of a new Illawarra Elective Surgical Services (INESS) through the provision of seven new operating theatres and 60 inpatient surgical beds
- as part of the IESS, the existing intensive care unit will be rebuilt to accommodate six additional beds, providing a new 24-bed intensive care/high dependency unit
- expansion of radiotherapy and chemotherapy services through the addition of a third radiotherapy bunker and six additional chemotherapy treatment spaces at the IRCCC
- expansion of the existing Emergency Department
- provision of a new Ambulatory Care Centre
- more inpatient sub-acute beds.

Thanks to an Australian Government grant, a new teaching, training and accommodation facility will also be built adjacent to Wollongong Hospital, giving students, trainees and qualified health practitioners more professional development opportunities and more training places.

The capital improvement program will also see significant changes to the ISLHD’s second largest facility, The Shoalhaven Memorial District Hospital in Nowra, which will have a new cancer centre and sub acute mental health service.

The Shoalhaven Regional Cancer Care Centre (SRCCC) will improve access to essential cancer care for the growing population and, in association with the IRCCC, provide enhanced haematology, medical oncology and radiotherapy services (clinical operation is scheduled to commence in 2013).

A webpage has been developed to provide updates on the progress of the redevelopment: http://www.sesias. health.nsw.gov.au/ISLHD/Capital_ Works/default.asp

Phase one of Wollongong Hospital’s redevelopment has commenced, with diversions in place on the hospital campus until further notice.
Breaking through the protein barrier

Understanding protein aggregation, and its role in Alzheimer’s and other diseases, is the focus of several research groups within IHMRI.

Associate Dean of Science Research, Professor Mark Wilson, worked alongside a group of international scientists in identifying a new method of studying proteins at the molecular level. Their findings were published in the prestigious *Nature journal, Nature - Structural & Molecular Biology*.

“Proteins are the biological molecules that make up a lot of the structure of our bodies and the enzymes in our bodies are all proteins,” Professor Wilson told UOW journalism intern, Melissa Coade, recently.

“Proteins can be damaged or age and when they lose their normal shape, they become sticky and stick to one another. These form lumps or aggregates which are problematic – if you get lumps formed in your brain from a protein called Alzheimer’s beta (amyloid-b1−40 peptide) you will develop Alzheimer’s disease.”

Using lasers and microscopes, the team studied how protein molecules (which had been labelled with different fluorescent labels) diffuse, or move randomly, through a tiny space in which they are bombarded by laser beams. The principle is that when you shine a light on something that is fluorescently labelled it emits a different coloured light.

“Each time a molecule moves through, it flashes and the equipment records the flash. This data allows us to measure individual molecules ‘sticking’ to one another,” explains Professor Wilson.

“Previously, it was technically impossible to measure down to that level and only a few people around the world know how to do it.”

To further their research endeavours, the university and IHMRI have now acquired a German-made Specialised Confocal Microscope System, valued at close to $1 million.

Not only does it allow magnification down to the molecule, it comes with single-molecule fluorescence (SMF) software that will greatly simplify a previously difficult mathematical calculation.

“The way SFM technology gathers and analyses the data is mind-blowing,” says Professor Wilson, adding that IHMRI researchers and collaborators will significantly benefit from the acquisition.

IHMRI collaboration likely to deliver next generation ceramic nanoparticles

A Targeted Nano-Therapy (TNT) collaboration draws on the significant experience of researchers from three research strengths at the University of Wollongong (UOW).

Recognised as at or above world standard, according to the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) rankings 2010, the three groups - Centre for Medical Radiation Physics (School of Engineering Physics), Australian Institute for Innovative Materials (AlIM) and the Centre for Medical Bioscience (Schools of Chemistry and Biological Sciences) - are working together under the IHMRI umbrella and achieving results that are likely to be the envy of their peers.

TNT PhD student Sianne Oktaria and Masters students, Adam Briggs and Ryan Brown, presented pilot data achieved by the group at Radiation 2012, held from 15-17 February at the Australian Institute of Nuclear Science and Engineering (AINSE) at Lucas Heights.

In fact the TNT played a key role in convening the conference, which had to be “resurrected” after the last one was held in 2006.

“Stéphanie Corde, from the Prince of Wales Hospital, and I took the resurrection of the conference as a challenge,” explains conference chair, Dr Moeava Tehei, from the UOW’s School of Chemistry and Centre for Medical Bioscience.

“Radiation 2012 succeeded in bringing diverse communities of people working with radiation together to discuss new techniques and applications.”

The student poster prize was awarded to Michael Weaver from the UOW’s Centre for Medical Radiation Physics (CMRP) for his research into the optimisation of brachytherapy treatment of eye cancer using a high-spatial-resolution solid-state quality assurance system currently in development at the CMRP.

Continued on page 4...
Generosity of local fundraisers helps cancer research

Funds raised at the Kiama Vintage Car and Motorbike Rally in September 2011 have been donated to IHMRI’s cancer research team to enable them to put more resources into a project that will ultimately see a new class of anticancer agents directed towards pancreatic cancer.

With additional funding provided by the Illawarra Cancer Carers, the project, headed by chemist Dr Danielle Skropeta, who is working in collaboration with Associate Professor Marie Ranson and Professor Philip Clingan, looks at the way pancreatic cancer cells mimic healthy cells by wrapping themselves in a coat of sialic acid sugars that trick the body into thinking they are healthy, thereby allowing them to evade the immune system.

“The project aims to exploit this process by developing innovative drugs that prevent the cancer cells from creating their invisible coat, leaving them starved of sialic acid and naked to the immune system,” explains Associate Professor Ranson.

Pancreatic cancer has one of the poorest prognoses of all cancers, so this kind of research is vital.

Who’s driving decisions to stop dementia sufferers driving?

Hospital-based physicians looking after people with dementia may, at some stage, suggest that their patients stop driving for the safety of others.

Curious about the factors influencing these decisions, as well as physicians’ use/knowledge of current guidelines, fourth year Graduate School of Medicine student, Jeremy Granger BAppSc, used his 2011/12 IHMRI Summer Scholarship for Dementia Research* to investigate answers.

He sent a questionnaire to a randomised group of hospital-based physicians who said that personal independence, denial and the failure of health professionals to discuss the issue of driving were major factors in delaying driving retirement. He also found that many physicians were unaware that guidelines relating to sufferers’ capacity to drive existed and most felt that more guidance was needed.

“As the population ages, the prevalence of dementia will continue to rise, so it is important that we get a better understanding of the issues surrounding driving and dementia,” says Jeremy.

“All the physicians interviewed agreed that clear recommendations relating to driving should be included in a patient’s notes when discharged from hospital.”

* Thanks to a very generous donor, IHMRI was able to offer four IHMRI Summer Scholarships for Dementia Research in 2011/2012. The aim of the program is to attract prospective higher degree research students with an interest in dementia and to provide them with research experience and an opportunity to evaluate for themselves, and demonstrate to others, their potential for research work.
Illawarra health stars align

The opinion pieces have covered a wide range of topics and both macro and micro perspectives on regional research.

IHMRI’s Executive Director, Professor Don Iverson, recently wrote a piece entitled Illawarra’s health stars align which highlighted the fact that, thanks to recent changes within the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District and Medical Local, the Illawarra is perfectly positioned to become a health research hub of the future. It is reproduced here in full for those who missed it.

IHMRI Executive Director, Professor Don Iverson, believes that the region is well positioned to capitalise on the booming health sector.

From the Illawarra Mercury

We have all heard about the negative impacts of recent job losses in the manufacturing sector and the urgent need for government and business to take action on creating jobs for the future.

Creating and sustaining new jobs is certainly challenging, but the picture may not be as dire as it first appears. In fact, a quiet revolution is occurring in the Illawarra and it is happening in the health care and social assistance sector.

According to national labour market information, health care and social assistance is already the largest employer in the region, employing over 24,500 people, or 12.7 per cent of the Illawarra workforce, compared to 11.5 per cent for the state average. On this solid foundation, we can build and develop a vibrant, health-based economy that will create more jobs and attract new capital.

Recent changes to the local health landscape, and at the University of Wollongong (UOW), are likely to accelerate this growth and create new opportunities for the existing pool of highly qualified and talented people to collaborate on health initiatives that will not only provide direct health benefits to local residents, but lead to the creation of new health-related businesses and services.

One of the key changes is the creation of the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD), which replaced the South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Service just over a year ago. And, on 1 January this year, Illawarra Shoalhaven Medicare Local (operating as Grand Pacific Health) replaced the Illawarra and Shoalhaven Divisions of General Practice.

The ISLHD and Grand Pacific Health now have responsibility for guiding the development and coordination of health and hospital services for residents of the Illawarra and Shoalhaven.

Local control over planning decisions is important because it means decisions can be considered and made within the context of the total local environment. Also, because the geographic boundaries of these organisations are the same, there is a real opportunity for improved planning, coordination and implementation of health and hospital services.

Add to the above the continued development of the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI), the proposed development of the UOW’s iAccelerator and Health Precinct and the creation of the Illawarra Stakeholder Taskforce and you have a potent mix.

IHMRI’s Clinical Research and Trials Unit expects a two-to-three-fold increase in the number of clinical trials running in 2012, creating opportunities for local residents to access new treatment options as well as bringing new money into the region.

iAccelerator, meanwhile, provides an environment for the ideas and discoveries of UOW students and faculty staff to evolve into products and services that spur the creation of new companies. Many of these products and services will be health-related.

Continued on page 6...
The next round of IHMRI project grants will open in March 2012 – please visit the website for updates.

It is expected that the proposed Health Precinct will create over 1,000 new health and medical jobs and develop the sector as a whole. It will also facilitate the development of health and medical-related research companies as the sector matures.

For these opportunities to be fully realised, however, it is essential that our leaders work together in a cooperative manner – which is why the creation of the Illawarra Stakeholder Taskforce is so important. The taskforce includes leaders from business and industry, local and state government, the education sector, health sector and union movement.

All the health ‘stars’ are now aligned, and we have a real opportunity to develop a new and expanded health-based economy.

A health-based economy can be a primary driver of the region’s evolutionary growth. Apart from improving the scope and quality of health and medical services that residents can access, a health-based economy will create a range of new companies and jobs.

The Illawarra has never been in better health.

CAMHS guest speakers (l to r): Dr Habib Behi, Professor Nagesh Pai with participant, Brian McGilligan.

Keeping child and adolescent mental health top of mind

A two-day educational update for clinicians working in child and adolescent mental health was held in late February/early March at Shellharbour Hospital.

Sponsored by MH Kids and organised by IHMRI, 35 participants from the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District’s CAMHS team, as well as affiliated stakeholders, attended.

The Acting Director of Mental Health Services with the ISLHD, Sue Karpik, inaugurated the program which covered topics such as brain development, disability and mental health, indigenous issues, evolving personality, assessment challenges, adolescent unit management, anxiety disorders and newer models of care.

Guest speakers included Professor Kenneth Walsh (Professor of Nursing Practice Development in the UOW’s School of Nursing, Midwifery and Indigenous Health), Professor Brin Grenyer (IHMRI), Professor Ngaire Brown (The Poche Centre for Indigenous Health, University of Sydney), Dr Habib Behi ( Psychiatrist, ISLHD), Dr Susan Thomas (Lecturer, Behavioural Science, UOW), Dr Gerard Stoyles (Lecturer, Child Psychology, UOW), Dr Praveen Dullur (Child Psychiatry, University of New South Wales), Dr Natalie Ong (Academic Co-Leader Paediatrics, UOW) and Professor Nagesh Pai (Graduate School of Medicine, UOW, Medical Director, IHMRI).

The Acting Director of Mental Health Services with the ISLHD, Sue Karpik, delivers the CAMHS address.
Workshop for carers of those with personality disorders

*Staying connected when emotions run high* is the title of the first workshop to be held in the Illawarra for families, partners and others supporting people with personality disorders or related conditions.

To be held on 29 March in Coniston, with a second planned for Nowra on 26 April, the workshops will be run by the Family and Carer Mental Health Program team within the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District and will be based on a program developed by psychiatrist, Dr Annemaree Bickerton and Family and Carer Consultant, Janice Nair.

While providing much needed support and education to participants, the workshops will also provide a platform for researchers from IHMRI’s Project Air Strategy for Personality Disorders to evaluate the program and contribute to the development of a resource for clinicians, clients and carers.

“Personality disorders are one of the most challenging areas of mental health,” says Family and Carer Mental Health Clinical Coordinator, Toni Garretty.

“There is a lot of stigma around the condition because many people don’t understand the disorder and sometimes treat the person as though they are just behaving badly.” Educating families will be a vital step in increasing awareness and strengthening relationships, she says.

To ensure that people expressing an interest in the workshop are caring for people with personality disorders, as opposed to some other form of mental illness, the team will be asking a series of questions, such as: Do you support someone who has relationship difficulties, displays impulsive and destructive behaviour and demonstrate changing emotions and strong, overwhelming feelings?

The workshops will also provide an opportunity to invite carers who may benefit from advanced skills training at a later date.

“Ultimately, the role of the Family and Carer Mental Health Program is to improve inclusiveness of mental health carers which ultimately benefits the consumer.

“We are all passionate about reducing stigma and increasing understanding and awareness around mental illness – and research is vital to this process.

“The Project Air Strategy is perfectly aligned to our needs and it is exciting to be working together on an education program which has been the missing link until now.”

Details: Kelly Hutchison. P: 4298 1571, E: info-projectair@uow.edu.au or W: projectairstrategy.org

New age dietetics explored

The 16th International Congress of Dietetics conference will be held in Sydney this year, with the University of Wollongong and the Dietitians Association of Australia inviting local and international delegates to attend a satellite workshop at the Innovation Campus on 4 September.

Entitled: *New Age Dietetics: How can we harness technology for practice?* the satellite draws upon the expertise of leading international speakers and will focus on the emerging use of technology in dietetics and healthcare, such as electronic dietary assessments and e-health.


Danish expert to deliver keynote at Plasminogen workshop

Professor Niels Behrendt, PhD, D.Sc, Principal Scientist with the internationally-recognised Finsen Laboratory at the Copenhagen University Hospital is keynote speaker at the Plasminogen Activation System in Pathology (PASP) workshop, to be held in the IHMRI Lecture Theatre from 23-25 September.

Organised by IHMRI researchers, Associate Professor Marie Ranson, Dr Kara Perrow, Dr Martina Sanderson-Smith and Dr Jason McArthur, the workshop will be of value to those interested in plasminogen activation across cancer, infectious, neurodegenerative and cardiovascular diseases. It will also provide a forum where complementary and/or novel expertise can be shared with a view to future collaborations and competitive grant applications.

Professor Behrendt will be involved in all four of the PASP’s main sessions and provide expert discussion on the role of the plasminogen activation across a range of inflammatory and infectious states, tumour invasion and metastasis, neuropathophysiology and cardiovascular disease.

There is no registration fee.

Details: http://ihmri.uow.edu.au/pasp
By participating in a gout trial, Steve will receive support in managing the condition, which has negatively impacted his life for more than 20 years.

Fear of playing with your kids, difficulty lacing your shoes, sleep disturbance and even, on some days, the inability to drive are just some of the debilitating side effects of gout, a medical condition characterised by extremely painful attacks of inflammatory arthritis.

Gout affects six to nine times more men than women and is caused by a build-up of uric acid in the bloodstream. Steven McIlhatton has suffered from recurrent attacks for more than 20 years. The IT manager from Leumeah, in Sydney’s south west, says it affects almost every area of his life.

He is afraid to play with his kids because a tackle may trigger an attack. At night, the sheets brushing over his skin can be so painful it wakes him up, and it has severely restricted his ability to exercise.

“The pain is blinding at times, almost crippling,” says Steven. “It affects many day-to-day activities and causes me to fear many situations.”

He had no hesitation, therefore, in clicking through to a Facebook ad recruiting for participants in a research study at IHMRI, which he qualified for.

The study is looking at the efficacy of Allopurinol, a gout medication designed to lower uric acid.

While Steven is already on the medication, the six-month study is evaluating the safety and lowering capabilities of Allopurinol and monitoring gout flare occurrences.

The fact that Steven received a full health check upon commencement was just one of the benefits of participation.

“I feel that [participation] is a great way to give back to the community and I was very curious and interested to experience a clinical trial – to see what happens behind the scenes.

“I was surprised to find such state-of-the-art facilities on the University of Wollongong campus; the building is brand new and everything is very modern. It is certainly very comfortable.

“What I most enjoyed, however, was the friendliness of the clinical doctors and nurses who are welcoming and professional and helped me feel relaxed and at ease.

“It has been a very good experience so far, and I’m obviously hoping to get some more relief from this horrible condition.”

Hypertension clinics for Illawarra residents

High blood pressure, or hypertension, affects millions of Australians and is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes, dementia, kidney disease and other serious illnesses. Despite its high profile, many sufferers are completely unaware they have the problem because it is not identified as part of a routine visit to a GP.

To fill this gap and improve the standard of care provided to hypertension patients in the Illawarra, IHMRI’s Clinical Research and Trials Unit has just opened a specialist clinic to manage and research hypertension in the community.

Professor Wilf Yeo, a specialist physician and clinical pharmacologist with 20 years experience in the treatment of hypertension, together with IHMRI clinic doctors, will provide patients with treatment according to Heart Foundation guidelines.

Patients attending the clinic will be asked if their medical information can be included in a study designed to evaluate the success of the guidelines and advance our knowledge about the best way to manage the condition.

Associate Investigator, Dr Lokesh Garg, says: “The clinic will improve access to specialist care for hypertension management in the region and all patients will receive a detailed cardio-vascular risk assessment and individualised risk management plan.

“The clinic is specifically designed to address areas like resistant hypertension and white coat hypertension screening using ambulatory blood pressure monitoring.”
Population Health Flagship

“Health Connect: A Chronic Disease Prevention Program for the Illawarra Shoalhaven Population” has been selected by IHMRI’s Scientific Advisory Committee and Board of Directors as IHMRI’s Population Health Flagship project.

Following a call for expressions of interest late last year, two proposals were considered and assessed against selection criteria including the experience and expertise of the team, the potential for impact, scientific validity, collaboration and evidence of community partnership.

Health Connect best demonstrates IHMRI’s commitment to improving the health status of Illawarra residents and will now receive substantial funding and support from IHMRI, the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) and the University of Wollongong (UOW).

A research team comprising Professor Linda Tapsell (UOW), Associate Professor Vicki Flood (UOW), Associate Professor Joseph Ciarrochi (University of Western Sydney), Dr Greg Peoples (UOW), Clinical Professor Jan Potter (ISLHD), Senior Dietitian Marianna Milosavljevic (ISLHD) and Clinical Professor Maureen Lonergan (ISLHD) will run a community-wide intervention of diet, physical activity and education over five years, as well as a trial looking into the effects of health coaching on dietary change, weight loss and weight maintenance.

“Chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease, are widespread in the Illawarra,” says Professor Tapsell.

“It creates a burden on the health system and has an impact on the social and economic fabric of the community. Chronic disease is strongly associated with individual lifestyle behaviours, such as diet and physical activity, and with psychological (wellbeing) factors.”

Health Connect addresses this multi-faceted problem by leveraging established relationships and an interdisciplinary framework involving clinicians, dieticians, exercise physiologists, psychologists, public health experts, statisticians and community health advocates.

The first key question the flagship will seek to answer is: What is the impact of a community-based intervention targeting healthy lifestyle behaviours on major risk factors for chronic disease?

The intervention strategy involves multiple activities and a partner randomised controlled trial testing the effect of combining diet and activity advice with psychological support.

“There are substantial issues to be considered in the design and analysis of the community intervention,” explains Professor Tapsell.

“These include specific design elements associated with sampling of the population for measurement of health status, exposure to the intervention strategies and the peculiarities of instruments used for health assessments.

“Substantial consultation with Professor David Steel from the Centre for Statistics and Survey Methodology is being undertaken.”

The second key question is: What is the effect of a health psychology intervention on the weight status of individuals who have succeeded in losing weight over one year?

This trial will compare the effects of diet/activity/counselling alone with one done in combination with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. The Randomised Controlled Trial will be conducted at IHMRI’s Clinical Research and Trials Unit (CRTU), with oversight from the CRTU’s team of doctors and nurses.

“Body weight is a major indicator of the development of chronic disease, so both studies will focus on weight loss and weight maintenance,” adds Professor Tapsell.

“Disease risk factors, as assessed through primary healthcare services (cholesterol, glucose/insulin and blood pressure) and psychological parameters will also be assessed. We hope to gain specific insights from the controlled conditions of the trial that will relate to the community intervention.

“The community network long established in the region will provide important guidance on the feasibility, implementation and monitoring of the project.”

Stay tuned for updates.
Joshua Calvert

What are your qualifications?
Bachelor of Nursing Science at the University of Wollongong, 1994. Clinical Nurse Specialist, Community Health.

Tell us about your role
It is a diverse role that involves me assessing and providing clinical care to rehab, spinal, amputee and Motor Neurone Disease patients in the inpatient hospital setting, in outpatient clinics and in the community. I am also involved in writing policy, business processes and educating both staff and clients.

Describe how you ended up in health and what motivates you
I have been a nurse for over 18 years and have worked in many fields in nursing both here and in the United Kingdom. I myself have had many hospitalisations over my lifetime and found myself being cared for by some wonderful people, including some wonderful nurses.

This is going to sound like a cliché but I got into nursing to care for people. I love being an advocate for patients and I value the work that all health professionals do.

Another thing that has kept me going in the health system, which can be challenging, is the fact that nurses have always been innovators and researchers. Nurses are curious people with a variety of skills and most are very adaptive.

I have always been motivated by trying to improve myself, the service or the environment that I work in, as ultimately this results in better health care outcomes.

In your field, what areas could be improved with further research?
I would like to develop an individualised health passport which, for instance, a spinal patient could give to a care provider outlining their specific and complex health care requirements.
This, I hope, would improve the quality of their care, decrease their length of stay and result in better health care outcomes. It would also help staff to quickly access information about the client in regards to medication, bowel and bladder routines and pain management.

Why did you join the IHMRI Research Network and what do you hope to get out of it?
I think that the role research plays in all of our lives is invaluable. I hope to get involved in my own project at some stage and believe that IHMRI can help me.

I have only been aware of IHMRI for a short time, but I have already begun talking up the benefits of being able to share knowledge. I believe it can act as a great conduit to link health care professionals with researchers.

What other interactions do you have with the university?
In the past I have been a university student facilitator for student nurses who attended their practicums at South Western Community Health Care Centres.

How closely do you work with Stephen and what is his area of expertise?
Stephen MacKay (left in photo) is the Clinical Trials Coordinator at Port Kembla Hospital. He works closely with Pain Specialist, Dr Guy Bashford, on clinical trials.

Anything else that you would like to add?
Just a quote that I find inspiring that encourages me to never give up: “If you like walking down the right path and you’re willing to keep walking, eventually you’ll make progress.” - Barack Obama.
news and events

Packed house for first IHMRI Seminar for 2012

On 7 March Networking Evening on social marketing with Dr Robert Marshall from Rhode Island.

7 March Networking Evening on social marketing with Dr Robert Marshall from Rhode Island

Sue Baker-Finch appointed president of IBC

On 15 February, IHMRI Chief Operating Officer, Sue Baker-Finch, achieved a significant milestone, being elected as the first female president of the Illawarra Business Chamber.

Reiterating what Professor Iverson says on page 5, Sue believes that the health sector will play an increasingly important role in growing the local economy by attracting new jobs and new capital.

"Clearly the education sector, led by the university, also plays a significant part in boosting the local economy," says Sue. "The IBC role will enable me to ensure that all the economic dots are connected to create a more sustainable future and give me an opportunity to encourage more health businesses - both public and private - to link into the benefits of the IBC."

Sue was elected Deputy Chair of the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District Board in 2011 and has been COD of IHMRI since 2008.
The links between the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) and the University of Wollongong (UOW) continue to strengthen, with the IHMRI model providing a powerful umbrella under which interdisciplinary research can flourish.

One of the areas in which clinical researchers, university academics and students are successfully collaborating is in the area of nutrition research, where several established and novel studies are well underway.

For example, the Pregnancy and Glycaemic Index Outcomes (PREGGIO) study, led by Clinical Professor Robert Moses (Illawarra Diabetes Service) with Professor Jennie Brand Miller (Sydney University), Professor Linda Tapsell (UOW/IHMRI) and senior dietician, Jane Cleary (Wollongong Hospital), is examining the effects of low Glycemic Index diets in pregnancy, with the target of 700 recruits expected to be reached by mid July.

Another example is a Department of Veterans Affairs-funded study on nutrition in older patients, with a team including Clinical Professor Jan Potter (Wollongong Hospital), senior dietitian Marianna Milosavljevic (Wollongong Hospital), Dr Karen Walton and Associate Professor Karen Charlton (UOW) also nearing completion.

This year, the IHMRI Population Health Flagship (see page 9) will introduce a new long-term research base, with students working with research leaders on pilot studies, collecting dietary and physical activity data and testing the utility of research tools for broader community intervention.

Pilot studies are also building links between methodologies associated with psychological wellbeing, exercise and dietary interventions and in consideration of their applications in clinical and primary healthcare contexts.

In 2012, student projects in Nutrition and Dietetics will also continue to build the capacity of nutrition research in the region. There will be a renewed focus on nutrition in aged care with malnutrition studies continuing and novel projects looking at diet and resistance training.

There are also studies on health services, including food services, dietetic services and an audit of practices involving weighing patients in the hospital context as part of their nutritional assessment.

“The combined efforts of students and researchers will deliver real and meaningful health outcomes for the community and help us address the rising level of lifestyle related diseases, including obesity,” says Professor Tapsell.

“IHMRI’s facilities, including the activity rooms and kitchens, enable our research to be conducted in an environment that is comfortable and welcoming to people participating in our studies. We now have everything in place to achieve great things.”