New Medical Dean takes a hands on approach

The University of Wollongong’s Graduate School of Medicine has been built on a foundation of involvement from community-based clinicians – and the new Dean is determined to make that involvement a two-way street.

Professor Alison Jones, who took up her appointment as GSM Dean earlier this month, is an internationally recognised toxicologist as well as a general physician and she intends practising both skills at Wollongong Hospital.

Professor Jones will also continue her role as a high-level advisor on acute public health toxicology incidents to NSW Health, WA Health and the federal Department of Health and Ageing, as well as serving on a NSW Government advisory committee on air pollution. She is currently advising Northern Territory health authorities and police regarding a substantial arsenic issue.

“I think as an academic it is important to remain clinically active, if you want to produce doctors for the real world,” Professor Jones said. “So I intend to continue to work in general medicine and toxicology at Wollongong Hospital.”

She said the GSM had an unprecedented level of support from medical practitioners in the region, and she hoped that her active involvement in clinical work would send a message that the support was appreciated and reciprocated.

Welsh-born Professor Jones studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, and spent eight years as head of Medicine at London’s Guy’s and St Thomas Hospital. During that time she was the Director of Britain’s National Poisons Service – advising the British Government on a range of toxicology issues including the potential dangers of terrorist attacks using chemicals.

Professor Jones came to Australia to join the University of Newcastle Medical School as Professor of Medicine and Clinical Toxicology, before spending the last 18 months as Dean of the University of Western Sydney Medical School.

She said she was attracted to the UOW position because it provided an opportunity to make a difference to the way doctors are trained.

“The University of Wollongong is producing doctors for a specific context – practising medicine in regional, rural and remote locations,” Professor Jones said. “The GSM had a novel curriculum and the way it is delivered is designed to produce robust and self-confident doctors”.

She said doctors who worked in rural areas, away from large centres with their specialist support facilities, needed to be “confident without being over-confident”.

“We need to produce rural doctors who are resilient, smart and possess the highest ethical, moral and clinical integrity,” she said.

She said as the GSM had produced its first graduates in 2010, her role would be to “consolidate the program and build on the foundations laid by the previous Deans”.

Professor Jones said she was also attracted by the opportunity to teach and undertake research around a strong program in a well-regarded university, and help shape the future of health care in the region.

“The GSM is extremely solid on community engagement, and that appealed to me. As a medical school, we should judge ourselves on our capacity – in partnership with others - to influence the health of the people in our region,” she said.

Professor Jones is looking forward to continuing her research in toxicology through the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute at UOW. She has written two textbooks on her specialty of clinical toxicology, as well as chapters for major medical textbooks and more than 150 papers on the topic.

“Australia is a toxicologist’s paradise,” she said “It is taken very seriously here because there are so many poisonous snakes and spiders and toxins in the marine environment.”
On the 10th June 2011 the Phase 1 team was presented with a University of Wollongong Faculty award for Outstanding Contribution to Teaching and Learning. The award application was based around four headings; Distinctiveness, coherence and clarity of purpose; Influence on student learning and student engagement; Breadth of impact; and Concern for equity and diversity. The application from the Phase 1 team was described by Professor Rob Castle as being “the most unusual application he had ever seen”. The award ceremony was attended by 22 of the Phase 1 team together with their friends and family, patient volunteers from both Wollongong and Shoalhaven and a number of our GSM clinical academics.

In preparing the application for the award, the Phase 1 team was able to truly appreciate the depth of quality in our Phase 1 curriculum, the degree of integration and teamwork required to deliver our curriculum and the exceptional quality of the many aspects of our curriculum that make it unique and contribute to its success. What also stood out in the application was the extent of meaningful community engagement associated with the delivery of Phase 1. To have almost 250 Phase 1 large and small group teaching sessions delivered by local community clinicians as well as almost 200 community volunteers willing to come in and act as patients for our students to practise on, shows the depth of community excitement at having “their own” medical school.

The Phase 1 team is led by Dr Kylie Mansfield and is made up of 45 individuals including medical scientists (11) who have developed and deliver the large group and online teaching sessions. GSM staff clinicians (14) who have developed the clinical cases around which our curriculum is integrated and co-ordinate the clinical placement activities. Clinical skills academics (5) who work to develop our students’ clinical competency. These academic staff members are supported by the professional (13) and educational technology staff (2) who co-ordinate the processes required for effective delivery of our curriculum.

The Phase 1 team members are (in alphabetical order): Dr Francis Antonio, Elfi Ashcroft, Dr Jenny Asquith, Leanne Betts, A/Prof Ulrich Bommer, Dr Lisa Brown, Professor John Bushnell, Linda Corrin, Jenny Deura, Jodie Douglas, Dr H John Fardy, Judy Hayes, Cassandra Healey, Dr Ian Hoult, Sue-Ellen Howard, Prof Nicky Hudson, Dr Theresa Larkin, Dr Alistair Lethbridge, Dr Helen Maloof, Dr Kate Manderson, Dr Kylie Mansfield, Prof Peter McLennan, Dr Darryl McAndrew, Dr Judy Mullan, A/Prof Lyndal Parker-Newlyn, Dr Russell Pearson, Sarah Perez, Dr Alex Petersen, Isabelle Potter, Kathryn Rhodes, Dr Warren Rich, Dr Helen Rienits, Dr Gregg Rowland, Dr Sal Sanzone, Kate Schreiber, Helen Simpson, Prof Noel Tait, Greg Teuss, Dr Susan Thomas, Jenny Tompson, Dr Teresa Treweek, Dr Kathryn Weston, Dr Coralie Wilson, Susan Vella, Prof Wilf Yeo.
News from the Murrumbidgee Region
Kate Davidson, GSM Regional Placement Facilitator, Murrumbidgee

The Murrumbidgee has now bid farewell to the second group of UOW Phase 3 students. The communities of Leeton, Griffith and Narrandera have again embraced the students on their long-term placement. GPs and their practice staff, local health professionals, and the wider community are now becoming accustomed to the GSM medical programme and see it as an invaluable means of helping to improve the recruitment and retention of doctors for rural, regional and remote Australia.

In May, the students were a part of a group of 25 health professionals who participated in the PIT STOP program at the Riverina Field Days in Griffith. PIT STOP is a men’s health screening and health promotion program developed by the Western Australian Department of Health.

Over 100 men aged between 20 and 90 years were screened. Health checks included Oil (Blood Pressure), Battery (AUSDRISK Type 2 Diabetes Risk Assessment), Chassis (Waist Measurements), Torsion (Physical Activity), Fuel Additives (Alcohol) and Exhaust (Smoking) and many others.

On a sporting note, Regional Academic Coordinator Dr Gerald Yuen enthusiastically encouraged two of the Murrumbidgee students to compete in the Canberra Marathon on 10 April, and another student competed in the Leeton Triathlon. The students generally got involved in local community activities such as basketball, tennis, local running clubs, church and choir! Also this year, four of our students got engaged which can only mean there was something wonderful in the waters of the Murrumbidgee!

More recently, students visited 2 local high schools in Griffith and provided Year 10, 11 and 12 students with an insight into studying medicine at UOW. They also shared personal experiences they’ve had during their Phase 3 placements. The GSM medical program generated much interest with the high school students, many whom were relieved to know there are other pathways for studying medicine, rather than traditional undergraduate medical degrees.

Illawarra and Southern Practice Research Network: Research Development Conference 28-29 May 2011
Bridget Dijkmans-Hadley - Practice Based Research Network Coordinator

The Illawarra and Southern Practice Research Network (ISPRN) has been established by a grant from the Commonwealth Government’s Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development Strategy (PHCRED). ISPRN aims to address the gap in research skills by developing a group of primary care practices devoted to the primary care of patients, as well as enhancing their ability to conduct research based on questions driven from their daily practice.

The Illawarra and Southern Practice Research Network (ISPRN) held its inaugural Research Development Conference on the weekend of the 28-29 May 2011.

Potential research projects were discussed during the conference including topics around improving primary care management of chronic diseases, such as diabetes management and obesity, and policy issues, such as the use of chaperones in general practice. The research ideas were workshopped to develop research methods knowledge and also to understand the types of research skills primary care clinicians would like to build on. ISPRN aims to mentor and support early and mid career researchers to undertake high quality primary health care research. It draws on academic research support from the GSM, as well as staff from other departments who have primary health care research interests, to support GPs in research.

If you would like further information regarding the network, please contact Bridget Dijkmans-Hadley at bdh@uow.edu.au or Dr Andrew Bonney at abonney@uow.edu.au.

Attendees at the Illawarra and Southern Practice Research Network: Research Development Conference 28-29 May 2011

L-R: John-Paul Mullins, Joel Riley, Brenton Cole, Sid Gupta, Kate McDonald, Vanessa Rees & Jessica Swann in attendance at a CPD event in Griffith.
Library News

Featured resource – Psychiatry Online

Jen Lyons - Medical Librarian

PsychiatryOnline is a new resource offering fulltext international psychiatry journals and reference works. Some of the titles include:

- DSM-IV-TR
- DSM-IV-TR Handbook of Differential Diagnosis
- Cases from DSM-IV-TR Casebook
- American Psychiatric Publishing Textbook of Psychiatry
- Academic Psychiatry journal

To take a further look, please access at http://www.psychiatryonline.com.ezproxy.uow.edu.au/ Note: access will require logging in with a UOW email username and password.

For further information or assistance with Library resources, please contact Jen Lyons, Medical Librarian on (02) 4221 5595 or email: jlyons@uow.edu.au.

Royal Australasian College of Physicians Congress, Darwin 22-25 May 2011

Tahira Scott-Phase 1 student

This year the congress was focused on Indigenous health and chronic diseases, with the college calling on the delegates to 'take up the challenge with closing the gap'.

The key point made by speakers when working in Indigenous health, was to have strong Indigenous leadership or endorsement by a respected community member or elder, to demonstrate that the project or research is genuinely set out to improve health outcomes.

Professor David Simmons, the current leading consultant of Diabetes at the institute of Cambridge University hospital, shared his past experience and time working with Aboriginal and Maori people. One project he reflected on was a Maori Diabetic prevention project. Here he reminisced on an initial consultation with a respected ‘Aunty’ or Maori leader of the community he was hoping to work with. After a day of building rapport and explaining the project objectives, Professor Simmons was taken aback by a comment the Maori Aunty made ‘I have watched you all day, and you know, you have not once looked at your watch.’ This simple stance of not being strictly held to time was a sign to the Aunty that Professor Simmons was genuine, equipped in cultural understanding and was sincere in wanting to see improvements.

I was really made aware of the power of the Indigenous community working together. One session played a short film based on an Aboriginal community’s response in Fitzroy Crossing to alcohol and the adverse affects on the unborn child. Women in Fitzroy Crossing became very concerned with the amount of children being born with foetal alcohol syndrome. This was of major concern to the community, where the Aboriginal culture is passed on verbally. The children were unable to retain this information in their memories. With elder endorsement, these women fought for the banning of full strength alcohol sales in their township. Despite some opposition from some community members, the ban has remained in place since 2007. So far the health benefits have been remarkable and improvement in general community welfare has also improved with reduced rates of crime and alcohol related injuries.

Attending this conference has allowed me to network with other medical students and doctors from around Australia. The social side of the conference was amazing having a mixer at the end of each day and ending the last day with a dinner under the stars. This experience has allowed me to understand more about Indigenous health and the factors that predispose them to increased incidence of ill-health. I would definitely recommend that anyone who considers attending a conference in the future, do so, as the experience and knowledge gained is very valuable.

A group of Aboriginal Performers from various tribes in Arnhem Land perform at the opening ceremony

Contributions to this newsletter regarding GSM centred events are both welcome and encouraged. Please submit via email to Jenni Broadhead (jb@uow.edu.au)