

News from the School of Public Health and Community Medicine

Newsletter #18; **July 2004**

Edited by Kevin Forde (feedback to k.forde@unsw.edu.au)

August edition deadline 28 July all items to k.forde@unsw.edu.au

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1. Head of School Report: School Strategic Directions

The School of Public Health and Community Medicine is involved in a strategic exercise to shape its objectives and direction. This is especially valuable in drawing us together around key consensus themes and approaches, and will assist in determining how best to use School resources to achieve our strategic objectives. The overarching theme is “Reinventing health – policy, practice and systems”.

The School meeting on July 7th will focus attention on the proposed Goals for the School and will seek to identify related Objectives and Strategies. Please be there and contribute to shaping the School’s direction. This is an important time and your involvement is key to developing a shared vision of where we are heading.

Our vision is of an international School of population health with particular emphases on:

- responding to the most pressing health-related needs in the communities with which we work and developing partnerships with communities and service providers
- ensuring strong interfaces between policy, practice and systems
- internationalizing the School and its activities
- working to promote social justice, equity and human rights

We aim to promote the achievement of this vision through a number of underpinning goals, strategies and activities. These emphasise:

- Critique, innovation and better practice
- Excellence in research
- Innovation and promotion of quality in teaching
- Ensuring that undergraduate and post graduate education are characterized by excellence which deepens and broadens understanding of the determinants of health, the scope and limitations of health service responses, and the role of health and other sectoral contributions to promoting health and wellbeing
- Establishing partnerships with health providers, policy-makers, communities and health-orientated institutions in Australia and across the globe

Please come to the School meeting on July 7th to take this forward. Be part of reinventing the School.

2. Research Student Retreat

I asked several people to give their thoughts on the recent student research day. When Karsten returns from leave we will put more feedback plus photos on the School website. If you have any comments on the research day that you will like placed on the website please email them to me – k.forde@unsw.edu.au

From Anthony Zwi

Our Second SPHCM Postgraduate Student Retreat was a wonderful event – a highlight of the 2004 SPHCM Calendar. Around 75 people gathered at Little Bay to hear presentations by research degree students at various stages of their studies. For some students this was their first time to meet School Faculty and to interact with other students. The excitement of talking about ideas, research methods, and early study findings was intensified by the beautiful surroundings and sighting of whales migrating up the coast earlier that day.

The day was characterized by enthusiasm and excitement – everybody seemed to enjoy the opportunity to grapple with new concepts and ideas and to hear from colleagues about their innovative research and approach to conducting it. I was thrilled at the high level of presentations and greatly enjoyed hearing new things from all those present – even my own PhD students despite relatively in-depth knowledge of their research. The quality of presentations was extremely high – some sessions could easily have taken place at an international conference.

Although the day started with sad news from Professor Bruce Dowton regarding his decision to move on early in 2005, the Dean's enthusiasm around the breadth of work taking place through the School and our associated Centres, and his challenge to ensure depth of engagement and contribution, inspired much subsequent discussion. The School theme of "Reinventing health – policy, practice and systems" was clearly reflected through much of the work presented on the day. We look to ensuring that the work undertaken by our PhD students, and the key research areas of the School are more and more closely related.

A special thank you to all the staff and students who made the Retreat happen (A/Prof. Mary Louise McLaws and Deborah Debono deserve special mention) and to all presenters, supervisors, and discussants present. Planning for the 2005 Research Student Retreat will start soon – let us know if you are willing to be involved.

From Mary-Louise McLaws

Thank you for your effort to take time from your busy schedule to attend the SPHCM Annual Research Student Retreat last Friday, 25 June 2004. It was very pleasing to have the support from by both our academics and conjoint academic staff. Our research students' presentations were of high standard - obviously the result of the time taken by you to ensure your student's power point and oral presentation were thoroughly prepared and practiced.

The Associate Dean (Research Students), A\Professor Ken Ashwell presented prizes to the following students:

Best Student Presentation - Beginning stages of candidature - Peter Nugus, located with the Centre for Clinical Governance, SPHCM.

Best Student Presentation - Middle stages of candidature - Rowena Forsyth, located with the Centre for Clinical Governance, SPHCM.

Best Student Presentation - End stages of candidature - Rosemary Aldrich, SPHCM.

Student of the Year - for outstanding student contribution - Annie Lau, located with the Centre for Health Informatics, SPHCM for her independent organisation and implementation of across Faculty student seminars during the past 12 months.

Outstanding contribution by a Supervisor - A\Professor Jan Ritchie for her provision of workshops, over and above her normal workload, in Qualitative Research Methods specifically for our research students.

From Maree Teesson

The day was a great success and a credit to the organisers, in particular A/Prof Mary-Louise McLaws and Deborah Debono. The aspects of the day that most impressed me were the high quality of the presentations and the diversity of the research areas. The topics presented covered international research, major public health issues such as heroin use, HIV/HepC, depression, improving systems of care and most importantly research with hidden populations and problems that had not yet been adequately researched. The methodologies implemented were always applied with rigour and appropriateness. Overall a day reflecting the strength of research in the School.

From Dr. Chinthaka Balasooriya

The postgraduate retreat was a great success, and many of us had a very enjoyable day. The setting was beautiful, the company was great - thank you all for coming - and hopefully our presentations were stimulating. I only wish I had more time to sit by the sea and talk to all the wonderful people who attended. On behalf of the postgraduates, I'd like to extend our special thanks to Prof. Anthony Zwi, for his untiring efforts to address the many issues that we currently face. We realise that the retreat is an important part of this effort, and appreciate this gesture.

In his opening statement at the retreat, Prof. Zwi identified "Challenging Conventional Wisdom" as a role of postgraduates in the School. I feel I have been doing a bit too much of this in the recent past, and feel that now is the time for compliments. So let me conclude by thanking the School for organising a great event, which demonstrates that it is possible to do great things in spite of conventional wisdom!

3. Staff achievements

Alan Hodgkinson received one of the President's Awards for 2004 at the ACHSE Annual General Meeting this month. The ACHSE State President makes these awards each year to people who have made a significant contribution to the College.

Alan was recognised for contributing to and single-handedly marking the major projects of the Management Trainees in the ACHSE Management Development Program over the past two years. The trainees produce a 5,000 – 6,000 word project on an appropriate health management topic each year they are in the two-year scheme.

The trainees are eligible for credit for an elective in the MHA at UNSW if they wish to pursue this program.

Jacqui Miller recently completed an Advanced Diploma in Business Management from the University of Ballarat in Victoria and the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE. She formally graduates on 14 July 2004 and anticipates pursuing postgraduate studies in this discipline. Following an 18-month 'hard slog' to complete assignments and prepare for exams, Jacqui says it's time now to party hard! Several social activities have been on her agenda with her former classmates and friends. Jacqui will miss the educational, stimulating, and often hilarious, discussions at Program workshops and the Fridays off work to attend them!

Liz Harris has been invited to participate in the WHO Task Force on health system research priorities for equity in health. This taskforce is preparing a paper for the WHO Health Research Summit in Mexico later in the year.

The WHO Equity Team, led by Dr Jeanette Vega, expect the Task Force to produce a background document (30-40 pages) on research priorities to fill the critical gaps in the knowledge base for health systems equity issues. The document will be discussed at the World Ministerial Summit on Health Research, 16-20 November 2004, Mexico City.

New Staff

Natalie Grove is research assistant to Professor Anthony Zwi. She has a clinical background as a paediatric Occupational Therapist and completed a MPH at University of Queensland. In Brisbane she worked with the School of Population Health, University of Qld attached to the Women's Health Australia project. She has travelled and has spent short periods working in Cambodia, Uganda, Romania and the UK. Her research interests are health in developing countries, child health and humanitarian and human rights issues in international health.

4. New on the Web

There are many new additions to our School website including:

A report from Dr Suzanne McKenzie on the GP and PHC Research Conference.

The link for this is - <http://sphcm.med.unsw.edu.au/sphcm.nsf/website/forstaff.conferencereports>

Last year the School submitted our recommendations to the Alcohol Summit. One of the initiatives to come out of the Government's response to the Alcohol Summit is the establishment of a new Government alcohol website www.alcoholinfo.nsw.gov.au. A copy of the Government's response and a Key Initiatives document is available at that website.

EQUINET and the School of Public Health and Community Medicine

EQUINET and the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of New South Wales (UNSW) held its first Capacity Building Workshop On Writing For Peer Reviewed Journals in Durban, South Africa, June 4-7 2004. See the following links for further information:

<http://sphcm.med.unsw.edu.au/sphcm.nsf/news-weblink/C1002BB38D?OpenDocument>

<http://sphcm.med.unsw.edu.au/sphcm.nsf/website/forstaff.resources.otherlinks>

5. Launch of the Population Health and Use of Medicines Unit

Professor Richard Day, Director of Clinical Pharmacology and Toxicology, St Vincent's Hospital and the University of NSW launched the Population Health and Use of Medicines Unit at the Therapeutics Centre, St Vincent's Hospital on June 24, 2004.

The Unit, lead by Associate Professor Andrea Mant from the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, has been established for the express purpose of measuring and evaluating population health outcomes in Australia as they relate specifically to the community's use of prescription medicines in the medium to long term. The Unit's research focus will be evaluating health outcomes that can be demonstrated once a particular class of medicines have become established and accepted in the treatment of specific modalities. Studies will also evaluate the

benefits of non-drug approaches where appropriate as well as combined approaches to treatment.

To this end, The Population Health and Use of Medicines Unit has assembled a national multidisciplinary specialist research group to undertake and supervise drug studies.

Project teams, established in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and ACT, have the principal objective of advancing knowledge relating to population outcomes associated with changes in drug utilisation within specific health priority areas – viz. mental health, cardiovascular disease, asthma, diabetes to name but a few.

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