

## **March 2009**

After what seems like a frenetic start to the year, I write to try to bring all of our staff up to date with some of the School's activities. While many were able to take some leave in January, our staff in the Academic Programs Office worked hard to process the new student applications, their subject selections, and all the other things that need to be dealt with. Despite the international financial challenges, we have had a solid Semester 1 enrolment of international students in our Masters programs, with strong Australian student enrolments (Totals are 89 MPH, 7 MEpi, 2 MSH, 5 MBio, 5 GradCertSexHealth, 3 GradCertBio and 3 GDipSH). The new School website is up and running and is a vast improvement in functionality compared to what we had before. This is of particular importance for prospective students.

Progress continues with our Teaching and Learning Management Committee working with assistance from Dr George Duke to examine our new degree options and to rationalize small enrolment subjects. Discussions are being held with both the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Arts on possible new collaborations for Masters courses.

The Excellence in Research (ERA) Initiative of the Government, managed by ARC, is being implemented with a slightly less ambitious introduction with the first two clusters (Humanities and Creative Arts, and Physical, Chemical and Earth Sciences) being treated as trials with a more realistic timeline. Associate Professor Jane Pirkis will be the ERA Cluster leader for Public Health and Health Services.

Grant writing has preoccupied many of us, and as at 13 March, we will have at least 28 NHMRC Project Grants and 4 ARC Grants submitted from the School this year. Congratulations to all on yet another superb effort in putting together high quality applications that should keep our School as one of the research heavyweights within the Faculty.

Professor Hugh Taylor (Indigenous Eye Health Unit) is the 2009 Helen Keller Laureate and will be presented with the Helen Keller Prize for Vision Research at the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology Meeting in the US in May. As part of the Government's response to Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd recently announced \$54m to go to indigenous vision and hearing programs including \$16m for trachoma eradication, as proposed by Hugh in intensive efforts that preceded this announcement to persuade the Government to act decisively on trachoma.

Professor Liz Waters (McCaughy Centre) has been appointed to the newly endowed Jack Brockhoff Chair of Child Public Health. A formal launch of this Chair, recognizing the wonderful gift from the Jack Brockhoff Foundation, will take place on 23 March, hosted by the Dean. The bushfire tragedy has affected many of us, with loss of friends and colleagues. Liz has played a leading role in the University's contribution to the community rebuilding effort.

Associate Professor Marilys Guillemin has been appointed as the Faculty's new Associate Dean (Equity and Staff Development), succeeding Professor Doris Young who has become Associate Dean (Academic). In addition, Marilys will be Acting Head of the Centre for Health and Society for the remainder of 2009 to allow Professor Ian Anderson to focus on the rebid for the CRC for Aboriginal Health and other major initiatives in Indigenous research at Melbourne. Onemda was reviewed at the end of 2008 by VicHealth and OATSIH and received a glowing endorsement followed by increased funding over the next 5 years (\$1.9m from VicHealth). We applaud VicHealth for maintaining its excellent commitment to Indigenous Health research and community development in Victoria, and we congratulate Ian and all the Onemda staff for an outstanding effort.

Associate Professor Harry Minas was successful in obtaining a major AusAid grant to establish a Mental Health Observatory in SE Asia. Parliamentary Secretary the Honorable Bob McMullin (responsible for AusAid in DFAT) launched this initiative at University house in February.

Late breaking NHMRC results (announced just days before Christmas) included an NHMRC Program Grant for Professor Kit Fairley (Sexual Health Unit, MSHC) and colleagues, and two new NHMRC Career Development Awards. One was to Dr Jodie McVernon (Senior Research Fellow, VIRGo). Jodie has also been appointed as Deputy Head of the Vaccine and Immunisation Research Group, and continues as Program Leader in its Mathematical Modelling Program. The other was to Dr Jane Hocking (Senior Lecturer, Key Centre for Women's Health in Society). Jane had completed her PhD under Kit Fairley, and a postdoctoral period with VIRGo before taking up her current appointment in the KCWHS.

Caroline Lodge (MEGA Epi) has been awarded NHMRC and Sidney Myer PhD Scholarships to do her work on childhood asthma with Associate Professor Shyamali Dharmage and colleagues. Karen Block (McCaughy) has won NHMRC and Sidney Myer Scholarships to study "Refugee Youth, Social Inclusion and Health". Another recipient of the Sidney Myer Scholarship is Gemma Carey (CHS) for her project on "Grassroots to Government: Investigating Social Inclusion, Health promotion and the not-for-profit sector". Dr Adrian Lowe (MEGA Epi) has been awarded an NHMRC post-doctoral training fellowship and intends to commence his fellowship in mid-2009 with the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute.

Dr Louise Keogh was appointed as Lecturer in KCWHS. Associate Professor Jane Pirkis commenced in January as the new CHPPE Director. Dr Angus Turner has commenced as a Research Fellow in the Indigenous Eye Health Unit. Emily Bailey has joined VIRGo from the Royal Children's Hospital in Brisbane. The restructured School Executive met for the first time in February. Members are (Terry Nolan, Dallas English, Kit Fairley, Anne Kavanagh, Janet McCalman, David Studdert, Hugh Taylor, John Wiseman, Harry Minas, Catherine Bennett, Shyamali Dharmage, Jane Fisher, Marilys Guillemain, Jane Pirkis, and Leanne Taylor). Sandy Bell, arriving from James Cook University, started as the new Site Manager of 723 Swanston St (MEGA Epi and KCWHS).

Professor Alistair Woodward, Head of the School of Population Health at the University of Auckland, is doing a sabbatical with us in MEGA Epi. Professor John Mathews will spend part of his week as the Executive Officer for the Menzies Foundation, succeeding Professor John Coghlan, but will continue his active research role in VIRGo and MEGA Epi.

Associate Professor John Fitzgerald has been appointed Executive Manager at VicHealth, (Healthy Eating, Alcohol, Tobacco, UV Exposure and Research). Having spent the past 3 years in the Centre for Health and Society as a VicHealth Senior Research Fellow, and as the Faculty's Associate Dean (Knowledge Transfer), John was to return to his substantive position in the Faculty of Arts. He will be starting his new role in early April and will be taking leave from his Arts Faculty position for a period of 3 years.

Finally, some of us have been involved in both the University's Deans and Heads annual planning conference in February and the Faculty Planning Conference in early March. One of the most important things being worked through has been a review of the Faculty structure. While not yet approved by the Vice Chancellor, Provost and eventually Council, a preferred option is being presented by the Dean that sees the Faculty with four graduate schools (Melbourne Medical School, Melbourne Schools of Health Science, Melbourne Dental School, and the Melbourne School of Population Health), together with a group of Faculty Institutes (including Nossal, Doherty, Orygen and possibly others). Details are still being worked out and all of this remains subject to University approval. However, I am very pleased to report a strong endorsement of the School within the Faculty from all quarters, and especially from the Dean.