

AUTUMN 2009

Research UPDATE

Helping to make a difference today - a researcher's story

WRI's researchers are at the heart of everything we do. Our researchers understand patients because they are on the front-line of health care – they are the doctors, nurses and health professionals who are diagnosing and treating patients every day.

Dr Roger Allen is one of these researchers. A thoracic (respiratory) and sleep physician, his main interests are in the treatment of sarcoidosis, asbestos-related disease, and sleep disorders.

Dr Allen is a fourth generation Queenslander and his mentor was his late father who was a family doctor. Dr Allen graduated in 1975 from the University of Queensland with 1st Class Honours and was awarded the University Medal in 1976. Over his 30-plus years as a physician, he has authored many medical-related publications, and is also an accomplished author in medical philosophy, poetry, and French.

Dr Allen is extremely passionate about the prevention and treatment of asbestos-related disease having seen more than 10,000 patients with this condition in its various forms.

"These conditions are not just those of tradesmen but of children who grow to adulthood, of white collar workers, of mothers and wives who washed work clothes and of neighbours who happened to live in the wrong street at the wrong time," Dr Allen said.

"Research is a tough business with lots of time and money needed as well as stamina and determination by those doing it, faith in one's ability and the need to keep going through the hard times," he said.

"We need all the help and support we can get to stop the needless suffering and dying as a result of the national tragedy that is asbestos-related disease."

Asbestos research to help patients breathe a little easier

As part of his work with the Wesley Research Institute's (WRI's) Asbestos Research Group, Dr Roger Allen is investigating the severity, incidence and treatment of pain in people who are affected by asbestos-related disease, in particular pleural plaques.

The pleura is the thin lining which covers the inside of the chest wall. Pleural plaques and pleural thickenings occur in this lining and are the hallmark of previous asbestos exposure. They lead to breathing difficulties, which can be very distressing.

Historically, there has been little research undertaken on pleural pain and it is expected the results of this study will lead to better understanding of the condition and enable the medical community to develop more appropriate treatment methods.

"I believe this study will help publicise this condition, which currently goes largely unrecognised by the medical profession. Misdiagnosis may lead to patients being labelled as hypochondriacs and unnecessary and expensive investigations such as cardiac catheterisation," Dr Allen said.

Dr Allen is currently collating the study data and expects to publish the findings later this year.



Dr Roger Allen with a patient



Dr Roger Allen



Message from our Director

The Autumn 2009 edition of WRI's Research Update is focused on our respiratory-related research projects. In particular, this edition highlights a project, a researcher and the Patron of WRI's Asbestos Research Group. This Group was initiated by Dr Maurice Heiner and Dr Roger Allen and formed by WRI in response to the horrifying rates of asbestos-related disease in Australia. This Group has since grown to more than 15 members. Recent studies suggest that between the years 2000 and 2050, more than 27,000 Australians will die of mesothelioma and other asbestos-related diseases.

I hope these stories will make you better aware of these conditions and our efforts to help address them.

On behalf of WRI's Board, researchers and staff, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy, healthy and successful 2009. I look forward to updating you on the latest research news and updates throughout the year including the opening of our new Health and Medical Research Centre later in the year.

Julie H. Campbell

Professor Julie Campbell AO, FAA



RESPIRATORY

INTRODUCING Dr Greg Hafner

Dr Greg Hafner has been appointed to the newly created role of Investigative Research Manager with the WRI. Greg's primary role is to drive investigator-led research initiatives to maximise the capacity of clinicians within The Wesley Hospital to undertake research.



Dr Greg Hafner

Greg brings over 15 years of research experience to the position. He has a Bachelor of Science Degree in the areas of microbiology and biochemistry and a PhD in virology and molecular genetics. Most recently Greg has been working as the Research and Development Director for Inverness Medical Innovations Australia (formerly Panbio Ltd) where he was responsible for the maintenance and development of the company's infectious disease diagnostic assays, which were sold internationally.

If you would like contact Greg he can be reached on 07 3232 6286 or ghafner@wesleyresearch.com.au.



Courtesy Kylie Cox

Institute funds two new research projects

The WRI is pleased to announce the funding of two new research projects. These projects are:

Dr John Lumley, Dr John Hooper & Dr Brian Meade – A Potential Marker and Drug Target for Colorectal Cancer

Researchers from The Wesley Hospital, Queensland University of Technology and the Princess Alexandra Hospital are investigating a protein that has been associated with the spread of colorectal cancers. It is expected that this research will lead to earlier, less invasive and more accurate diagnostic tests for colorectal and other cancers and may guide the development of therapies to prevent cancer spread.

Dr David Schlect, Dr Richard Knight & Dr Jamie Trapp – Reducing Adverse Side Effects in Stereotactic Radiosurgery

Treatment for particular brain tumours involves the use of radiation therapy where very small radiation beams are targeted precisely at tumours. This project aims to generate computer simulations of potential new radiation treatment regimes and determine the most accurate and effective therapy models to minimise the possibility of neurological side effects for patients.

Congratulations to the successful applicants whose projects commenced on 1 January 2009.

How a little can mean a lot

Isn't it amazing when you break open the piggy bank and realise how much you've saved without really missing it? Well, the same principle applies when our supporters become regular donors.

Regular monthly giving is a wonderfully convenient way to show your continued support for WRI without the budget planning often associated with an annual gift. Your monthly donations can still add up to, or exceed your annual gift, but you are less likely to notice the smaller amounts.

By simply arranging a direct debit authority from your bank account or credit card, your regular gift is gratefully received each month and provides a regular stream of income to WRI so we can plan future research to improve patient care and quality of life for so many.

You can join WRI's regular giving program today by filling in your details on the back page of this newsletter. For more information, please call Rod Knapp on 07 3232 6292 or visit www.wesleyresearch.org.au.

Our Asbestos Research Patron

A little over a year since the passing of her husband Bernie Banton AM, Karen Banton continues his fight for justice for all those affected by asbestos exposure.



Mrs Karen Banton and Professor Julie Campbell AO, FAA

In addition to providing support to sufferers and their families, Karen is also focused on continuing the awareness campaign against the dangers of asbestos exposure and helping researchers find better ways to diagnose and treat these debilitating diseases.

In this capacity, Karen Banton accepted the role of Patron of the Wesley Research Institute's Asbestos Research Group in July 2008.

"There are people out there who are yet to be diagnosed and there are people who are still at risk of being exposed to asbestos. It is for these people, and those that are currently suffering and will have their lives cruelly and unnecessarily cut short, that we must fight," Karen said.

"It is indeed an honour to be Patron of the Wesley Research Institute's Asbestos Research Group and help these dedicated and experienced doctors and researchers breathe a little hope into the lives of everyday Australian families like mine."

For more information about the Wesley Research Institute's Asbestos Research Group, please visit www.asbestosresearchgroup.org.au.

ASBESTOS
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Dr Maurice Heiner	Dr Nikki Whelan
Dr John Lumley	Dr John Yaxley
Dr Ian Martin	

MEDIA PARTNER |



Dr John Feenstra with a patient

PULMONARY
HYPERTENSION
STUDIES

A recent WRI study is trialling a new treatment for pulmonary hypertension, which is a serious condition in which there is high blood pressure in the arteries that supply the lungs. The blood vessels narrow and the vessel walls thicken and cannot carry as much blood. As the pressure builds the heart pumps harder as it tries to force the blood through, the heart struggling to keep up with the increasing workload. As less blood circulates to the lungs, less oxygen is available which makes the patient feel dizzy, tired and short of breath.

Led by Dr John Feenstra, the WRI study will investigate a new treatment to help reduce pressure within the pulmonary vessels with the aim of decreasing breathlessness and improving heart function.

WRI research expertise to benefit Vietnam

Paediatrician Dr Nguyen Thi Ut is the face of WRI's drive to bring better health to the people of Vietnam through clinical research.



Dr Ut treating a patient in Hanoi

Supported by Allens Arthur Robinson Charity Committee, WRI hosted Dr Ut in an intensive first learning program at the WRI's Brisbane premises in collaboration with doctors at The Wesley Hospital.

As part of Dr Ut's WRI research training program she established a database of information on premature babies admitted to The Wesley Hospital special care nursery with breathing problems. By collecting information on the results of treatment she was able to contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness (best results) of the unit.

Bubbling with enthusiasm, Dr Ut returned to Hanoi in December to begin the exciting process of teaching her medical colleagues the kind of clinical research practices that are often taken for granted in Australia.

"In Vietnam thousands of little children are suffering too much. We need the resources and the knowledge to help us diagnose more accurately, to treat children resulting in less pain and suffering and to make sure they recover properly," Dr Ut said

Legendary philanthropist Chuck Feeney, whose donations through Atlantic Philanthropies have greatly stimulated medical research in Brisbane, identified Vietnam's great need to improve patient care.



Dr Ut with Professor Julie Campbell and Allens Arthur Robinson representatives

WRI took up this challenge and has taken the first steps to introduce research leading to improved health outcomes as an integral component of Vietnamese doctors and nurses' daily practice.

Your donation will help us make a difference today

I would like to support the Wesley Research Institute with a donation to:

The research area with the most urgent need OR One or more of the research areas listed below (please tick)

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