

# DESIGNING VicReN

## VICTORIA'S FIRST PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH NETWORK

In May 2007, the Victorian Primary Care Practice Based Research Network, (VicReN) was launched from the Department of General Practice at the University of Melbourne. This collaboration between primary care practitioners and research academics aims to spur the development of important and high quality primary care research.

Whilst improved knowledge and health outcomes are universal goals of PBRNs, their adjunct aims, organizational and governance structures, funding sources and research objectives vary widely. This is a reflection of the differing needs of communities, foci of PBRN memberships and the available network frameworks. After consideration of these factors based on an extensive literature review, communication with PBRN leaders internationally, and stakeholders locally, VicReN's structure was designed.

A network is, by definition, an interconnected web of things or people. It is best sustained therefore by clear communication that builds trust, led by a shared aim. VicReN is strategically guided by a Reference Group, and its research content and membership is directed by the knowledge of VicReN's core GP Practice

Committee members. Since these core members have more research enthusiasm than experience, VicReN seeks to build their research capacity. Furthermore, three levels of membership are offered to suit members' research commitment. Having a well-established university framework of research expertise and training supports members' needs and the network aims. This somewhat symbiotic relationship typifies the close collaboration and communication involved to build a PBRN.

Being masterful means to gather and reflect upon existing knowledge and communicating with others to explore how best to design a network based on members' aims, needs and interests within a feasible framework. With a firm foundation established, VicReN looks to building its membership, accepting applications from all primary care practitioners, and research agenda to change the face of the primary care evidence base. Visit: [www.gp.unimelb.edu.au/vicren/](http://www.gp.unimelb.edu.au/vicren/)

**Melinda Soós and Jane Gunn**

**Dept General Practice**

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IN THIS ISSUE	Pg No:
From the editor	2
Members in Action	2
The Bridges-Webb Medal	3
Launch of PHReNet-GP	4
GPET Convention	5
Introducing ..W.Brodribb	5
New Course at JCU	6

### President's Message

The AGM was a breakfast session occupying the full 90 minutes and with great discussions and debates from the floor. A major part of my report was around the GP Education Summit held in Melbourne and the gratitude the organisation owed to Jon Emery for moving this matter forward underwritten by his concern for the development of Community-based Clinical Schools. Sadly Jon was not

rewarded for his work by funding for a Perth based initial school.

Another outcome from the summit discussed at the meeting was a proposal "That AAAGP recommends to the Minister for Health & Ageing that any enhancement of Medicare's item number that rewards medical practitioners for teaching medical students in their practices be linked to performance indicators of quality of teaching". We have

(Con't page 2)

(Con't from page 1)

written to the Minister on this matter but as you can imagine, the electoral campaign has played havoc with political activities.

We also noted the appointment of new RRADO Rachel Lee. She is working on new guidelines for GP registrar academic posts. We wish her every success in her new position.

We have a new award, the Bridges-Webb Medal. This award is to recognise members who have made and will continue to make international standard teaching or research contributions to academic activities in the general practice environment. Charles Bridges Webb was chosen as

the person to name the medal after due to his major contribution to both research and teaching and he says he feels very honoured to be recognised in this way.

The RQF continues to give us headaches and a workload. As our end-users are often clinicians who do not contribute to the medical literature our efforts may be seen to be discounted. We will endeavour to make sure this is recognised by the powers that be.

May everyone have a happy and safe holiday and best wishes for the New Year.

**Mark Nelson**  
**President AAAGP**

## Members in Action—Book Publications

### **“Save Your Life & the Lives of Those You Love”**

By Prof Leanne Rowe & Prof Michael Kidd

This easy to read book focuses on healthy living. There are “6 steps to staying healthy” which explain how to avoid life threatening illnesses and add up to five years to our expected lifespan.

The writers recommend what we can do to prevent catastrophic illness and how to take control of our own health. The book highlights the most common illnesses, how to identify them, prevent them and respond to their early warning signs.

The book is based on the extensive research and clinical practice of the authors. A concise reference for anyone interested in getting serious about living a healthy lifestyle.

*Review by Debbie Mutton*

### **“The Foundations of Primary Care - Daring to be Different”**

By Joachim Sturmberg.

This publication challenges all to refocus on the subjective and social nature of health and illness.

The book takes a whole systems approach, synthesising the diverse perspectives of patients, health care professionals and health service planners, through an exploration of the background and underpinnings of medical care, and the context and the workings of the doctor as a healer. The final section outlines a pragmatic framework for the redesign of the primary (health) care system that embraces its very foundations.

Ian McWhinney in his foreword states - [the book] lays out a plan which leads to a

## Letter from the Editor

This edition of the newsletter kicks off with members networking about their networks. Melinda Soos and Jane Gunn give valuable insight into the setting up of VicReN and we celebrate with UNSW as they pay tribute to GPs who are their partners in PHReNet-GP.

We learn that James Cook University has been busy providing a training opportunity for budding GP researchers. Two of our members have had books published, and John Furler brings encouraging news from collaborating with other primary care researchers in Oxford.

Wendy Brodribb shares with us how a penchant for figure fiddling put her on the path to academic general practice and if you think you've seen it all, Anne Messenger and Steve Trumble's account of the GPET convention may surprise you.

We are particularly pleased to announce that AAAGP will be awarding the new Bridges-Webb medal to deserving members and Michael Kidd provides an inspiring account of the achievements to date of Charles Bridges-Webb after whom the medal is named.

Thanks to all who have contributed to the newsletter throughout the year and we look forward to maintaining a relentless flow of useful information in 2008.

*Sincerely, Graeme Horton*  
*Discipline of General Practice*  
*Newcastle University*

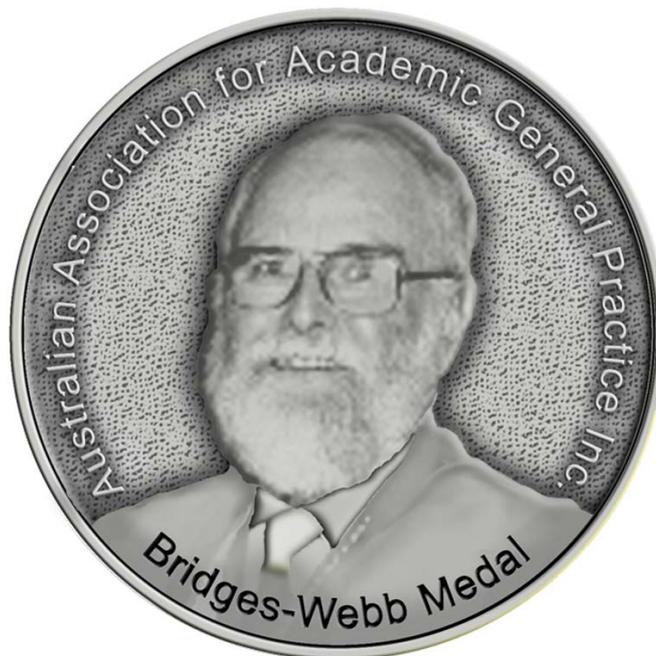
goal to which we all aspire - a healthcare system based on primary care and primary health care which expresses the historic values of medicine and adapts itself to the complexity of modern medicine."

Announcing.....

## The Bridges-Webb Medal

AAAGP will be awarding the Bridges-Webb medal to members who make outstanding contributions to the field of general practice education and research. Nominations will be called from members each year and the presentation will be made at the annual GP & PHC Conference.

AAAGP is pleased to be able to name the medal after a founder of Australian GP research. The following account of the life and achievements to date of the man behind the medal is provided by Prof Michael Kidd from the University of Sydney.



**Emeritus Professor Charles Bridges-Webb AO** has been a major international figure in primary care research for many years and an inspiration to many general practice researchers in Australia. Charles was awarded a Doctorate of Medicine from Monash University in 1971. This was for his early work in general practice research. The same year he was made a Fellow of The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Charles was awarded a code and classify the health problems being seen and treated in primary care. The creation of this code has proven to be an immense benefit to clinicians, health planners and communities around the world.

His publication on morbidity and treatment in general practice in Australia (Medical Journal of Australia 1992;157:S1-S56) is one of the most important research publications ever from Australian General Practice. For the first time the patterns of disease seen in Australian General Practice were quantified thereby offering an understanding of the nature of health and disease in the community. This seminal publication has been the basis for much ongoing work in this field both in Australia and overseas. Charles was appointed the Australian representative on the International Classification Committee of WONCA (the World Organization of Family Doctors) and was Chairman of the WONCA International Classification Committee from 1991-1998. He was actively involved in the development of the International Classification of Primary Care (ICPC) and led the development of the second revision of this internationally accepted classification system. This is a clinical coding system now used in many countries to

Charles was born in Australia on October 15 1934. He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at The University of Melbourne in 1957. From 1960 to 1975 he worked as a general practitioner in the rural town of Traralgon where he commenced his interest in medical research and in particular his life long interest in the classification of primary care. Charles was appointed a Foundation Professor of General Practice and Head of the Department of General Practice at the University of Sydney in 1975. On his retirement in 1994 he was awarded the title of Emeritus Professor by The University of Sydney in honour of his many years of distinguished service.

Charles has been a member of the Australian Association for Academic General Practice since its inception in 1984. He was President of the Association from 1989-1991 and worked to foster research skills among many young general practitioners in this country. Charles has a continuing role as an educator of general practice registrars with The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. The research contribution of Charles Bridges-Webb has been recognised in Australia through his receipt of the 1993 Rose-Hunt Award of The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners for outstanding services to general practice. He was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2002 for service to medicine, particularly in the field of primary care research and practice. He has recently published his autobiography "To Travel Hopefully".

## Working Towards a Common Goal

### Recognising the importance of General Practice in primary care research

The UNSW Research Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity launched its new Practice Based Research Network, PHReNet-GP, at a dinner in October and also acknowledged the enormous contribution that GPs and other practice staff make to the research of the centre.

During the evening researchers and GPs mingled, discussing their common goals of high-quality primary health care research and improved patient care. Prof Nicholas Zwar introduced the idea of PHReNet-GP, a network of practices

interested in participating in primary care research. The network will help streamline approaches to practices and should allow GPs and practice staff to become more involved in CPHCE research.

The network will follow successful overseas models and is only the second of its kind in Australia. It will represent a partnership between general practice and researchers, and should move towards better quality primary care research.

Another important part of the night was recognising the outstanding contribution of individual GPs to CPHCE research. Prof Mark Harris, the

centre's executive director, presented awards to 5 GPs who had been nominated by centre staff for their dedication to primary care research:

Dr Peter Edwards, Dr Vipin Goyal, Dr Qudsia Hasnani, Dr Philip Lye, and Dr George Tang.

For more information about PHReNet-GP please contact Suzan Mehmet at [phrenet-gp@unsw.edu.au](mailto:phrenet-gp@unsw.edu.au) or on 02 9616 8520.

For all other matters relating to CPHCE please contact Rachel Tomlins at [r.tomlins@unsw.edu.au](mailto:r.tomlins@unsw.edu.au) or on 02 9385 1505.

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## The Brisbane Initiative—Visit to Oxford

### Fostering leadership in international primary care research

The Brisbane Initiative emerged from a meeting of Heads of Department of General Practice from across the world in 2002. The group, responding to a perceived intellectual and leadership crisis in primary care, developed a pilot program to foster and develop future leaders in primary care research. The two year program consists of a residential workshop at the beginning and the end of a two year period and a series of interdepartmental visits in between which provides participants with the opportunity to further develop leadership skills, form collaborations on projects and produce joint publications.

I, along with Parker Magin from Uni Newcastle, joined the second cohort for our first residential

workshop in Oxford in the first week of September this year. The group, which included two Australians, one Belgian and nine UK participants was housed in St Hughe's College for a 4 day period, at the balmy end of what had been a poor summer. The workshop was intense yet informal. It was facilitated by two Australian international leaders in primary care research, Professor Chris Del Mar and Alison Ward, now based at Oxford. We had input from the Said Business School of the University, with opportunity to workshop our leadership aspirations, strengths and weaknesses. There was ample time to meet in small groups and discuss potential collaborations and shared research interests.

The four days was of enormous value, providing a space to reflect on how to grow and develop research projects into programs and build links

internationally. One of the greatest privileges was to hear from people such as Trish Greenhalgh of University College London, Paul Glaziou of Oxford and Fiona Godlee from the BMJ discuss their own pathways to primary care research leadership. Each has an engaging manner and intriguing stories to tell of careers that were rarely linear. It made me think we should be seeking out amongst our students those that choose less than conventional options in our efforts to build creative primary care leadership in the future. Above all I came away with a great sense that Australian primary care research can stand tall with the rest of the world, and was inspired to be amongst a group with such commitment and enthusiasm.

**John Furler**

**Dept General Practice**

**Melbourne University**

## GPET Convention gets to grips with Training Capacity

More than 420 GP educators, supervisors, registrars and RTP staff gathered at the Gold Coast for the GPET Convention to examine and consider solutions for the future of general practice training.

The Convention, entitled 'Practical Solutions: Education and capacity building in general practice vocational training' focused on methods and modalities for accommodating and training increased numbers of medical graduates, prevocational doctors and registrars over the next decade and beyond.

The Convention opening included a welcome to country from Josh Walker and the Yulu-Burri-Ba dancers; a 'virtual' (DVD) welcome from the Minister for Health and Ageing Tony Abbott; and opening addresses by the college presidents, Dr Vasantha

Preetham from the RACGP and Dr David Campbell from ACRRM. Keynote presentations included a highly relevant and engaging talk by Professor Tim van Zwanenberg from the UK about his experiences, and strategies for, dealing with a large increase in GP trainees in a deanery in the north of England. Keynote speaker Dr Victoria Brazil, an emergency physician from Royal Brisbane Hospital, described the benefits of simulation training as part of an integrated educational program for trainees.

On day two of the Convention, GPET National General Manager Program Improvement and Workforce, Rodger Coote, gave a plenary presentation on projected future training demand, supply and community need. GPET Chair, Assoc Prof Simon Willcock, presented an update on the recommendations from the General Practice

Education Summit held on 24 July and on further work required to implement recommendations from the Summit, including the six recommendations presented to the Minister relating to strategies for resourcing community practitioners (especially GPs) to teach more students.

A final plenary panel discussion included debate on the Summit recommendations and future collaboration needed to implement 'practical solutions' for training.

The social highlight of the Convention was a beach party-themed dinner with dozens of gender-reversed David Hasselhoff/Pamela Anderson clones.

Intriguing.

**Anne Messenger & Steve Trumble**

## Introducing .....Wendy Brodribb

### What do I do?

About three years ago I must have had a mid-life crisis and changed my life direction completely. I had started off in general practice although for the previous 10 years I had concentrated on women's health issues.

I have a very strong interest in breastfeeding and lactation issues and had volunteered many hours and as much expertise as I had in this field. I am now a full-time (with a little bit of clinical work on the side) PhD student. My thesis is entitled "Improving the breastfeeding skills and knowledge of GP registrars". So far I am finding it stimulating and fulfilling - learning a lot and

finding out very interesting information with my research.

### What attracted me to research?

I became involved with a breastfeeding research project being undertaken in Toowoomba and realised that I really enjoy finding out information and looking at ways of improving a situation. I had been doing a small amount of quality improvement research in the job I was doing at the time and liked to be able to see what was working and what wasn't. I also love fiddling with figures. I thought I might start doing a small amount of research in my main area of interest - breastfeeding - but was

encouraged to enrol for a PhD instead.

### Do I have any tips for others?

You are never too old to find new challenges even though it can seem a bit overwhelming at times.



## New Course at JCU Provides Flexibility & Guidance for PC Researchers

GPs interested in boosting their research skills can take advantage of a new course offered externally by James Cook University.

The Graduate Certificate of Primary Health Care Research is a part-time course that will allow GPs, practice nurses and other allied health professionals to 'dip their toes into the research pond', according to James Cook University (JCU) Professor Craig Veitch.

Professor Veitch is head of the Primary Health Care Research Evaluation and Development (PHCRED) at JCU (PHCRED-JCU), a Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing funded program, that developed the course in conjunction with the School of Medicine.

'Research networks are being established that focus on clinical problems, but also provide support and guidance to those new to research.'

'One of the best aspects of this certificate course is that it can be conducted in their own time, in an external study mode.'

'But participants will get a lot of guidance to help them through the uncertainty that every researcher feels when they approach their first study.'

The certificate course will focus on issues such as qualitative research methods, epidemiology and statistics for public health. Students will complete a 'minor project' that is relevant to their professional activities and experience.

Statistics is one particular topic

that must worry new researchers the most and may ultimately stop them from moving into research at all," he said.

However, research comes with the job description for many doctors, so gaining these skills early on in your career can save a lot of pain later."

Payment of all or part of the tuition fees for the certificate may be deferred through HECS-HELP.

Health professionals who would like to find out more about the Graduate Certificate of Primary Health Care should call Robyn Preston on 4796 3383 or email [robyn.preston@jcu.edu.au](mailto:robyn.preston@jcu.edu.au) for an information kit.

## Gala Dinner 2008

AAAGP will again be hosting their Annual Gala Dinner during the GP & PHC Conference in 2008 at Hobart 4-6 June. Join us for a great night of fine French dining at Café Toulouse. More details later.

### Mission & Goals

Formed in 1983, AAAGP aims to promote & develop the discipline of general practice through:

Encouraging originality, questioning & exploration of ideas within teaching & research environment.

Providing a forum for exchange of information & ideas.

Encouraging shared academic activities.

Fostering & supporting career development in academic general practice.

Supporting the continuing development of academic general practice

The AAAGP newsletter is to be published in Mar, July & Nov each year and welcomes letters to the editor and also articles about issues of general interest to the membership.

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