The newly refurbished postgraduate research students’ common room at the Northern Clinical School is very impressive. Known as ‘Common Room 31’ (as it is located in Building 31 at Royal North Shore Hospital), the new facility boasts an impressive array of facilities for the 120 postgraduate students based at the Hospital.

This development was made possible by a successful application for funding from the University of Sydney’s inaugural Research Postgraduate Infrastructure Scheme in 2004. The project was managed by the Northern Clinical School Postgraduate Research Student Society (PReSS), under the supervision of Associate Dean Professor Michael Field.

“Our postgraduate research students studying at the Royal North Shore Hospital work at all corners of the hospital campus, and the provision of a centrally-located common room to bring them all together, for both scientific and social purposes, is a very welcome development”, Professor Field said.

Outgoing PReSS President and PhD student Scott Stanners managed the project and was delighted with the outcome. “The intended result was to enrich the student experience at the Northern Clinical School by providing a central place where research students can gather, interact and relax,” said Scott. “You can already see the positive impact this is having on the students,” remarked Chris Scarlett, incoming PReSS President.

Special thanks are also due to Professor Manad Behnia, the University’s Dean of Graduate Studies for promoting the Research Postgraduate Infrastructure Scheme 2004, to Deborah Latta, the RNSH General Manager for the space, Tim Palmer from University of Sydney Clubs and Societies for their support, and to Michael Leung, the architect who generously donated his time and design skills. Active support was also provided by Professor David Burke, the Dean of Research and Development for the College of Health Sciences, and Professor Andrew Coan, the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine.

Scott Stanners, Outgoing PReSS President and PhD Student

To add your name to the mailing list, or for change of address, please contact Executive Officer, tel: (02) 9926 6190, fax: 9926 6188

QUEEN’S BIRTHDAY HONOURS 2005

This year, two of our esteemed Northern teachers have been awarded Queen’s Birthday Honours, and have been presented with the Member of the Order of Australia (AM).

Professor Gillian Shenfield was awarded the AM for service to medicine, particularly in the field of clinical pharmacology and therapeutics in Australia, and to education.

Professor Trevor Parmenter was awarded the AM for service to education and to the community, particularly in the design and development of vocational and best practice initiatives in the field of developmental disability studies.

Congratulations to them both for their outstanding achievements.
STUDENTS LEND A HAND IN INDONESIA

Four medical students from the Northern Clinical School spent their mid-term break in May aboard a 90 foot charter boat in West Sumatra, Indonesia, providing medical aid on the island of Siberut. Led by Alyssa Scurrah, who was undertaking her elective in Indonesia when the December 26 tsunami occurred, the students returned to continue Alyssa’s efforts to bring medical care to the people of the Mentawai Islands.

The students were welcomed by UNESCO officials at Muara, Siberut and spent their first day meeting with local authorities, learning about life on Siberut since the December tsunami. There are 18 villages on Siberut, most of which are at sea level and are linked by a narrow concrete road. Siberut is located south of Nias and was not actually reached by the tsunami, but has been affected by recent earthquakes and fear of another tsunami has forced many locals to flee from their villages to makeshift refugee camps in the hills. The villagers have little in the way of sanitation and hygiene, and with no running water these issues have become even more pronounced in the refugee camps.

The students ran clinics in six villages over five days, seeing 150 patients each day. They were assisted by staff from the local Puskesmas (hospital) and its Apotik (pharmacy), and by UNESCO officials who acted as translators. Sometimes a second assistant was required to translate between Indonesian and the local dialect. The students’ clinical skills were put to the test, with not even basic laboratory investigations available. Impetigo and superficial fungal infections were universal in the children, and many also had worms. Malaria is endemic in this area, and splenomegaly was a common finding. Masu were in short supply at one village after a stream of patients presented with textbook symptoms of tuberculosis.

Many of the women presented with aches and pains, noting they were now walking down and up 300 steps each time they leave the hill camps, often carrying children and heavy supplies. The students learned the healing power of human touch, a simple physical examination and a few kind words that acknowledged the struggle facing these displaced people.

The villagers of Siberut are awaiting news that it is safe to return to their homes, but unfortunately it is news that cannot be delivered. In fact the tectonic plates under the Indian Ocean west of Siberut are under a high amount of stress, and Professor Kerry Sibb from Caltech in Pasadena, US, who predicted the December 26 tsunami, believes that the next one will be close to Siberut. At present many small earthquakes can be felt on the island each day. Even the students felt an earthquake of 6.9 during one of the clinics.

Inspired by their Indonesian adventures and the opportunity to assist a population in need, the students are developing a strategy to bring public health education to the villages of Siberut via existing UNESCO communication networks. The students are setting up a foundation called “Harapan” (Indonesian for hope) and will be conducting small fundraisers to set up some long term projects in Indonesia. If you would like to donate to the cause or get involved in other ways, please email Alyssa – ascarrah@gmp.usyd.edu.au

Jennifer Reilly, Med 4

Alyssa with patient

NEW CLINICAL EDUCATION CENTRE OPENS AT HORNBY HOSPITAL

Students, clinicians, Northern Clinical School staff and Hospital administrators gathered to celebrate the opening of the new Clinical Education Centre at Hornsby Ku- ring-gai Hospital on May 24th. They were joined by Mrs Jean Himmelhoch, widow of the late Dr Albert Himmelhoch, after whom the Centre is named. Two of Albert and Jean’s daughters, Dr Margaret Himmelhoch and Mrs Anne Horne were also guests at the opening.

Dr Himmelhoch was remembered for his passion and commitment to the education of medical students and young doctors. As a general practitioner on the North Shore in the 1970s he lobbied for funds to establish the first General Practice Training Unit in Australia, linked to Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital and staffed by him and hospital residents who trained under his expert guidance. Dr Himmelhoch later became Medical Superintendent at Hornsby Hospital, and was famous for his commitment to teaching and support of students and new medical graduates. Sadly Dr Himmelhoch died in January of this year, but his legacy will be remembered through the activities of the Clinical Education Centre and the establishment of a new student scholarship fund to be named in his honour.

The new Unit replaces our previous premises which have now been demolished as part of the Hospital’s redevelopment of emergency, maternity and paediatric services. We are delighted to have enhanced facilities to accommodate our increasing numbers of students across all years of the medical program. These include a dedicated student common room and greatly improved tutorial room facilities.

Dr Simon Willcock,
NCS Sub-Dean, Hornsby Hospital

STOP PRESS: KOLLING WINS CANCER INSTITUTE AWARDS

Kolling Institute cancer researchers have had remarkable success in attracting support from the recently formed NSW Cancer Institute. In the first two funding rounds they have been awarded 4 out of a total of 22 senior fellowships offered state-wide (Deborah Marsh in Round 1 and Carolyn Scott, Sue Firle and Janet Martin in Round 2). These fellowships provide salary and research support up to a total of $197,000 per year for 3 years. At the same time students working in the Kolling Institute have received 6 out of a total of 26 postgraduate research awards, each providing $25,000 per year for 2-3 years to cover research and travel expenses. Round 1 successes were Michelle Moscova and Michelle O’Han, while Round 2 awards went to Wey Yeong Chee, Amy Au, Paty Soon and Chris Scarlett (working in Surgery and Kolling).

In addition the Kolling has been awarded two Infrastructure grants by the Cancer Institute, to groups headed by Dr Learyd and Bruce Robinson (for the thyroid cancer database) and Rob Baxter, and Kolling Researchers have co-investigator status on two further multicontexture infrastructure grants, for breast tissue banking and proteomics (out of a total of 26 Infrastructure grants awarded). Together these scholarships, fellowships and grants will bring almost $3 million in new research funding to the Institute over the next 3 years.

L to R: Professor Michael Field, Dr Margaret Himmelhoch, Mrs Jean Himmelhoch, Mrs Anne Horne and Dr Simon Willcock

Jennifer Reilly, Med 4

L to R: Rob Zielinski, Jennifer Reilly, Alyssa Scurrah and Scott Stirling en route to Siberut

L to R: Professor Michael Field, Dr Margaret Himmelhoch, Mrs Jean Himmelhoch, Mrs Anne Horne and Dr Simon Willcock (speaking on behalf of the Med 2 students)

Dr Simon Willcock, NCS Sub-Dean, Hornsby Hospital
“CANCER TEAMS” UP WITH THE WALLABIES

The Pam McLean Cancer Communications Centre (PMC) is rapidly extending its activities beyond its base in the Northern Clinical School.

Contracts have been finalised with the Cancer Institute NSW and the NHMRC National Breast Cancer Centre to deliver workshops on multidisciplinary communication for cancer teams throughout the state, and to conduct national workshops for breast care nurse coordinators. These will run through the second half of this year and aim to optimise communication and co-ordination among multidisciplinary team members to deliver the best possible care to cancer patients. The PMC has produced short training DVDs to accompany the workshops, with enthusiastic input from the Australian Rugby Union. Several current and former Wallabies have lent their support to getting the message across that “Great teams don’t just happen”. Additional footage is being shot with the New Zealand All Blacks to give the Cancer Teams program a truly ANZAC quality.

Other collaborations are in progress with the new QLD Health Skills Development Centre at Royal Brisbane Hospital. This collaboration will provide a cohort of trainers and surrogate patient/actors based in Brisbane. They will be involved in an ambitious workshop in November 2005 that the PMC will run conjointly with the American Society of Clinical Oncology and the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia. The PMC’s approach to breaking bad news has recently taken on a new dimension incorporating research data emerging from our ambulatory measurements of autonomic arousal in doctors breaking bad news to an actor/patient. Some doctors experience heart rate increases from a baseline of about 80 bpm up to as high as 130 bpm. The research team includes staff at the PMC, The Sydney Simulation Centre, and NCS medical students.

Professor Stewart Dunn,
Director, Pam McLean Cancer Communications Centre

AND THE WINNER IS...

Beumont Prize in Psychiatry

Penny Taylor (2004 NCS graduate) was presented with the Beumont award in Psychiatry for her Honours Project entitled “What Factors Influence the Development of Somatization”, at the Undergraduate Unit at Roselle Hospital on 4 May 2005. The prize is named for the late Professor Peter Beaumont, long-time Head of the University Department of Psychological Medicine.

In attendance at the presentation were Professor Philip Boyce (Head, Discipline of Psychological Medicine); Professor Michael Field (Associate Dean, Northern Clinical School); Dr Atsumi Fukui (Medical Director for Neuroscience at Pfizer, corporate sponsor of the prize); and a number of members of the Discipline. The medal was presented by Professor Field and the prize money was presented to Penny by Dr Fukui.

Semmelweis Prize for Clinical Infectious Diseases

Stephanie Arnold (Med 4) was presented with the Semmelweis Prize for Clinical Infectious Diseases for her Honours Project entitled “Flavivirus-mediated regulation of human antigen presenting molecules”. Her research was published in the journal Virology in July 2004.

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM NEWS

Royal North Shore has just welcomed a group of visitors from Vietnam who will be training at the University of Sydney for three months under the Hoc Maï program. They include an endocrinologist, paediatrician, urologist, psychiatrist, anatomist and a nurse. In addition, Dr Tran Duc Thai, the Head of Neurosurgery at Hoc Medical College is here for two weeks looking at nursing curriculum at the College of Nursing with Professor Judy Lumby. A gynaecology/oncology surgeon from Ho Chi Minh City will be arriving in late July.

Nine Med 2 students have won scholarships to visit Vietnam this year. The fortunate nine were selected from an unprecedented number of 20 applicants. They are: Irfan Abdulla and David Tran (Hue); Christopher Anderson and James Todd (Danang); Leo Kim, James Posle, Sarah Sasso, Debra Scott and Hilary Stiel (Hanoi). The scholarships are funded this year by the Hoc Maï Foundation, the Northern Clinical School, the RSL, and the Myer Foundation.

In addition, the RSL has again supported scholarships for four NCS students to visit Papua New Guinea and Fiji at the end of their Year 2 studies. They are: Alison Rutchie and Joel Hisinsk (PNG) and Ruth Noel and Amy Harkness (Fiji).
THE NORTHERN CLINICAL SCHOOL WELCOMES...

NEW STAFF SPECIALIST IN NEONATOLOGY

The Northern Clinical School would like to welcome Dr Mary Paradisis. Born and raised in Sydney, Mary first studied for a Bachelor of Science and then commenced medical training with The University of Sydney. After a year of adult medicine, Mary started paediatric training at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children at Camperdown, and then moved with it when that institution became the Children’s Hospital at Westmead. Her advanced neonatal training was at Westmead Hospital and RPAH. During that time Mary completed a Masters of Medicine (Clinical Epidemiology). Following that she worked as a neonatal research fellow for 2 years at RNSH and RPAH and has commenced a PhD looking at the prevention of low cardiac output in very preterm infants.

Mary joined the RNSH Department of Neonatology in March this year and is continuing her research studies, as well as being strongly committed to medical education. Mary's academic appointment is as Conjoint Lecturer.

CLINICAL SCHOOL STAFF

Scarlet Hill

Scarlet is the new part-time Administrative Assistant for the Northern Clinical Skills Centre. She moved to Sydney in 2002 and is from Orange. Scarlet is on leave from her full time studies for a BA in Design (Fashion and Textiles) at UTS.

Jacquie Langereis

Jacquie has also joined the Skills Centre Team, after a varied career in Nursing. She completed her training at Sydney Hospital in the mid-70’s and has subsequently obtained a postgraduate Intensive Care Certificate as well as a Diploma of Herbal Medicine. She exemplifies her own motto: Laughter is always the best medicine.

Brigitte Stoppel

Brigitte has been appointed part-time Administrative Assistant to the Clinical School Coordinator at Manly Hospital. She is available Monday to Thursday, from 9am to 3pm. Brigitte has a Business Science Degree in Marketing from the University of Cape Town.

New Arrival

Congratulations to Stephanie Tozer and her husband Craig on the arrival of their son Blake. Blake Bruce Tozer was born on 6 April 2005 at RNSH and weighed 3.45 kg. Jacquie Langereis is coordinating Clinical Skills while Stephanie is on maternity leave.

TELL US YOUR NEWS!

If you have something of interest you would like included in the next edition of the newsletter, just email your idea to the Editor, Sam Miles. If your suggestion is selected, you will be asked to write an article and where appropriate, to provide a digital photo or photos for inclusion. Please email: smiles@med.usyd.edu.au

VOLUNTEERING IN EAST TIMOR

East Timor is one of our closest neighbours, yet quite distant with respect to standard of living. East Timor officially became independent from Indonesia in 2003 when the United Nations stepped in and helped to restore peace. The country is now slowly rebuilding after its tumultuous past.

The Bairo Pite Clinic (BPC) is a small health clinic run by Dr. Daniel Murphy (“Dr. Dan”) since 1998. He is one of the most committed doctors I have met. His enthusiasm for providing health care to the East Timorese is admirable, and his clinic has become an important part of the health care delivery system. In the month I spent with Dr Dan, the clinic saw 4475 general consultations, 438 maternity patients, 22 post-partum cases, 123 family planning consults, 220 immunisations, 391 dental patients and 102 inpatients.

A typical day included working in the accident and emergency room, attending to wounds, suturing and bandaging, consulting with patients, injections of penicillin and antimalarials, consulting patients to the Dili National Hospital for admission or consultations with specialists. I also found myself in the middle of a Dengue Fever epidemic and working with WHO specialists who had flown in to the country to help control the outbreak.

Most cases and education focused on tropical medicine - malnutrition, Dengue, malaria, TB, Spirochataceae diseases and rheumatic heart disease. Over the month, I contributed to the cases by getting diarrhoea, malaria, peripheral neuropathy, insomnia and exhaustion. It was a lot of hard work, long days, 6.5 days a week with both a language and cultural barrier. It was also the most inspiring country I have been to, and I walked away from the experience a very different medical student and human being.

Lloyd Kwanten, Med 2

Before embarking on his experience, Lloyd organised the ‘Music for Timor’ event, which raised money for essential medical supplies and helped create awareness of the current problems facing East Timor through radio interviews, magazine and newspaper articles and local business involvement. He raised $1700 for basic supplies such as penicillin, aspirin, antiseptics etc. These supplies were concentrated at Dili Airport, and Lloyd had to meet with government and customs officials on more than 10 occasions to try and have the supplies released to the clinic. After a couple of negotiations, he eventually succeeded.

Editor

OUR STUDENTS WIN FACULTY SCHOLARSHIPS

The following Northern Clinical School students were recently announced as winners of a range of Faculty-awarded scholarships, based on academic merit and other specific criteria.

- Anthony Byrne (Med 4) - Habib Family Scholarship
- Jennifer Morrison (Med 4) - Douglas Hill Memorial Foundation Scholarship
- Vanessa Sammons (Med 4) - GS Caird Scholarship and John Wait Scholarship
- Lziel Whyte (Med 4) - John Wait Scholarship
- Philippa Sharwood (Med 3) - John Wait Scholarship
- Kathleen McGrath (Med 3) - Hoc Mai elective scholarship to Vietnam
- Jessica Sylvester (Med 3) - Hoc Mai elective scholarship to Vietnam
- Gemma Winlo (Med 2) - Women’s College ‘Medical Scholarship’