Welcome to the first Discipline of Surgery Newsletter. An ongoing review of the Discipline of Surgery has highlighted the need for improved communication, as the long-standing Monday morning discipline meetings had become poorly attended. It was suggested that these be replaced by several dinner meetings throughout the year, at which discipline business could be conducted. Richard Allen also suggested a regular Discipline Newsletter to supplement those meetings. The first business meeting was held on Tuesday 22nd June and this Newsletter contains the highlights of that meeting. The review of the discipline, involving a personal, focused interview with all discipline members, is ongoing and those who have not yet had the opportunity to meet with me will be contacted in the next few months. The next business dinner meeting will be held in October and will incorporate exam question writing.

Leigh Delbridge
Head, Discipline of Surgery
22nd July, 2010

DISCIPLINE OF SURGERY BUSINESS MEETING

At the business meeting, there were presentations from Vincent Lam, Chairman of the Surgery Curriculum and Assessment Committee, Mohamed Khadra, Chairman of the Postgraduate Research and Innovation Committee, and James Rogers, President of the Sydney University Student’s Surgical Society.

Vincent Lam, Curriculum and Assessment Committee

It is almost three years since the completion of the review of the University of Sydney Medical Program undertaken by Emeritus Professor Kerry Goulston and Emeritus Professor Kim Oates. Members of the Discipline of Surgery have provided significant input into the review process. A major outcome of the review is that responsibility for curriculum and assessment issues has now returned to the various disciplines. Arising from the review were four recommendations for core curriculum and learning objectives:

1. There should be a core curriculum with clear objectives
2. The core curriculum and learning objectives should be available to students and teachers as a single document. This should be in hard copy as well as electronic
3. The development of the core curriculum and learning objectives should be the responsibility of the Stage Coordinators in cooperation with the Discipline Heads. It should include a mechanism of regular updating each component of the USydMP
4. The core curriculum should have clear links with each week’s teaching program

Michael Cox and Mohamed Khadra are to be congratulated for the work they did in revising the surgery curriculum during the curriculum review period. To provide the students a better learning experience, the Curriculum and Assessment Committee of the Discipline of Surgery was established with members from each clinical school, including myself from Westmead Clinical School, Raffi Qasabian from Central Clinical School, Ben Cass from Northern Clinical School, Anil Keshava from Concord Clinical School, Mauro Vicaretti from Western Clinical School, Michael Cox from Nepean Clinical School, Peter Cosman from Sydney Clinical Skills and Simulation Centre, and Leigh Delbridge as Head, Discipline of Surgery. Two main tasks for the group are surgery curriculum review and developing surgery questions for the Stage 3 Exams. We look forward to the challenges ahead and hope to provide the essential surgical teaching that is required to be a competent doctor.
The Discipline of Surgery at the University of Sydney continues to provide excellence in postgraduate education with opportunities through a research only, or a combined research and coursework pathway. In research terms, we are blessed to have some of Australia’s finest units supervising PhD, Master of Surgery (Research) and Master of Philosophy programmes. There are currently a total of 19 research students in the Discipline of Surgery of which the majority are at Doctorate and Master level. The Discipline is able to boast such Units as the Baird Institute at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, the Colorectal Unit at Concord Hospital, The Endocrine Surgical Unit at Royal North Shore, the Vascular Biology Research Centre at Westmead Hospital and the newly establish Whitely-Martin Research Centre at Nepean. In 2010, the Discipline of Surgery surpassed all other surgical departments in the country in terms of postgraduate coursework opportunities with over 100 students. The Master of Surgery by Coursework and the Graduate Diploma are the most popular with students choosing these degrees to better prepare them for entry into surgical training. More senior surgical trainees and Fellows have embarked on the newly established Doctorate of Clinical Surgery which is designed with three major component: clinical, research and electives to afford a broad engagement across a number of non clinical disciplines. Candidates are encouraged to take electives on far reaching topics such as ethics, law, economics and management. The idea of the Doctorate of Clinical Surgery is to better produce surgical leaders and academics for the future. In 2011 the Discipline looks forward to consolidating its postgraduate offerings, articulating the DClinSurg with SET training, and expanding numbers in the Master and Doctorate degrees. In order to promote the Discipline’s postgraduate degree program, which is the largest of any academic surgical department in Australia, the advertisement below will shortly be appearing on a regular basis in the ANZ Journal of Surgery and College News.
James Rogers, President SUSS

The Sydney University Student’s Surgical Society has been acting in its present form for the last three years. Its primary aims are to provide surgical educational opportunities for both surgical aspirants and the general medical student population, and to help facilitate the progression of surgical aspirants into surgical training programs. To further these aims the society has organized various functions. In addition to this SUSS is developing ties with similar societies at other Australasian universities, and with the RACS. We are enthusiastic to help facilitate educational opportunities for medical students at all clinical schools, so if you are interested and have an idea that you would like to propose to the medical students, contact us at jamesmprogers@gmail.com.

Clinical Academic Titles

One issue repeatedly raised in the discipline review has been that of clinical academic titles. The Faculty has now asked for comment in relation to a proposal by the Discipline of Ophthalmology for the establishment of guidelines for the award of clinical academic titles. Below is the Discipline of Surgery’s initial revision of the Ophthalmology proposal incorporating recommendations distilled from the various comments made by discipline members already interviewed. Any comments, suggestions or changes would be most appreciated and will be incorporated into a further submission to Faculty.

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Each Newsletter we plan to highlight some “Surgical Stars”, including current members of the discipline who have achieved a significant award or made a significant contribution, former members of the discipline who have made a significant contribution, surgical units with an international reputation, as well as notable international visitors.

Carsten Palme, Chris O’Brien Travelling Scholar

Carsten Palme is our first “Surgical Star” as a current member of the Discipline of Surgery. The American Head Neck Society and the Australian and New Zealand Head Neck Society have created a joint award to honour Professor Chris O’Brien in order to foster ongoing education and research between the two continents. Carsten Palme, head & neck surgeon from Westmead, had the great honour and privilege of being nominated as the first scholar. In January he visited Memorial Sloan Kettering, New York, the Wharton Head Neck Cancer Centre, Toronto and MD Anderson, Houston. Carsten reports “My trip commenced in January 2010. I arrived in a very chilly New York City. After overcoming jetlag I attended the Head Neck Cancer Service at MSKCC, where I was warmly welcomed by Dr Ashok Shaha and his faculty. On my first day I joined Dr Dennis Kraus in his clinic seeing a wide variety of very interesting pathology. In the afternoon I attended the operating rooms and I observed Dr Shaha and Dr Wong perform both primary and revision thyroid surgery. On Wednesday evening I was invited to attend a dinner with the Head and Neck Surgery Faculty and I presented at Grand Rounds on Thursday on the topic of “Contemporary Management of Metastatic Cutaneous SCC of the Head and Neck “. On Friday I had the great pleasure of attending a clinic by Dr Michael Tuttle, who is a world renowned thyroid endocrinologist. This was a most informative day during which I was exposed to the most complex cases of recurrent and aggressive thyroid cancer pathology. I left New York for Toronto, which I consider my second home having spent a significant time there during my fellowship in 2002 and 2003. I attended the operating theatres on Thursday and observed my old mentors in action. I presented Grand Rounds of the Faculty of the Department of Otolaryngology, University of Toronto on my experience with trans-oral laser surgery of early vocal cord cancer. I then flew to Houston, Texas, to visit MD Anderson where the hospital budget exceeds $3 billion. There are in total 12 head neck surgeons, 4 clinical fellows, 7 residents and 11 physician assistants. In addition the speech therapy department, which is part of the head neck services, is run by the very enthusiastic and dynamic Professor Jan Lewin and a team of 8 speech therapists. Clinics run every morning and afternoon and there are 4 operating rooms performing head and neck surgery. I spent time with the fellows and was able to share in their experience and gain insight into the training they receive at MD Anderson. This trip was one of the most intense and amazing experiences in my professional life as a head and neck surgeon. I was exposed to some of the most extraordinary and impressive institutions anywhere in the world. It was a great privilege and honour to spend time with the world leaders in head and neck oncology.”
Tom Reeve is clearly a “Surgical Star” among former members of the discipline. Two weeks ago a retirement lunch at the University of Sydney was held by Cancer Council Australia for Tom, now aged 86, who was Head of Surgery at the University of Sydney from 1982 to 1987. After his “first” retirement from the university he took up a post with the Australian Cancer Network, now part of Cancer Council Australia. Tom was instrumental in developing guidelines for the management of a range of cancers, including breast cancer, melanoma, colon cancer, prostate cancer and lung cancer. Many of these guidelines have become standards of care throughout the world and have been translated into a range of languages. Tom was awarded the Gold Medal of Cancer Council Australia for this contribution.

SOURCE (Surgical Outcomes Research Centre)

One of the units closely associated with the Discipline of Surgery that can really be regarded as a “Surgical Star” is the Surgical Outcomes Research Centres (SOuRCe), headed by Micahael Solomon. SOuRCe is a multidisciplinary, not for profit, academic research unit of Sydney South West Health Service and the University of Sydney. It is dedicated to the advancement of evidence-based surgical practice through the conduct of outcomes-oriented surgical research. SOuRCe, established in 2002, focuses on improving surgical outcomes. It is the first of its kind in Australia and one of just a handful of such research units in the world, leading research in these areas: the methodology of randomised controlled trials and alternate evaluative trial designs; outcomes assessment for surgical patients; health services research; economic analysis and quality of life studies in surgery. SOuRCe promotes the application of clinical trials, health services evaluation, surgical outcomes assessment including quality of life assessment, health economic assessment and methods to facilitate evidence-based patient choice to surgical operations and diagnostic tests related to surgery. SOuRCe has a strong focus on surgical oncology. SOuRCe also provides education and training for surgeons in evidence-based medicine and research methods through various programs including the Masters of Surgery Program at the University of Sydney. SOuRCe comprises of a multidisciplinary team of clinical and research staff from backgrounds in surgery, epidemiology, health economics, medical psychology, public health and nursing. Staff from SOuRCe have published over 130 peer review publications and presented 65 pieces of work at conferences nationally and internationally. The primary goal of SOuRCe is to promote an evidence-based approach to improving clinical practice and achieving the best possible outcomes for patients. For more details about SOuRCe please visit www.source.org.au

The Discipline of Surgery Newsletter will be produced four times a year and will act as a means of communication with all members of the discipline. We plan to report important faculty issues and meetings, as well as highlighting our “Surgical Stars”. Any suggestions or contributions for the next Newsletter will be gratefully received. Please send any contributions to leigh.delbridge@sydney.edu.au