UNSW president visits SPHCM to meet the UNSW Future Health Leaders

The Elite UNSW Future Health Leaders program had its annual workshop on August 3-7th 2015. UNSW President Ian Jacobs visited the School on August 4th, and enjoyed meeting the students so much that he came back for a longer discussion with them two days later. We were honoured to have the opportunity to interact with the Vice-Chancellor in the classroom.

The UNSW Future Health Leaders Program is a work-place based 3-year professional doctorate for candidates identified by the workplace as future leaders. This unique program seeks to make academia relevant to the health workplace in a partnership model. The program is based on applied research, done while working in the health sector, and using a scholarly approach to addressing problems and issues relevant to the workplace. Candidates do intensive coursework and complete a professional doctorate (DrPH) based on their professional practice.

The DrPH aims at strengthening the practitioner based knowledge and practice with graduates able to generate and use evidence within the context of real world challenges and priorities. As a qualification it is in line with international trends demonstrating the advantages of a professional doctorate for practitioners and leaders in public health and health management as an alternative to a PhD. Graduates with a professional doctorate are recognised as experienced health professionals and practitioner researchers who can take on senior and leadership roles within public health and health service settings.

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Photo from L to R: Dr Michael Wang, President and Vice-Chancellor Professor Ian Jacobs, Professor Raina MacIntyre, A/Professor Joanne Travaglia
By Sue Clarke

**Struggle everywhere and suffering – Ganga age 21, mother of 4**

Ganga’s words describe the common experience of women living in poverty in Nepal. The recent earthquake will exacerbate the effects of underlying poverty, malnutrition, food insecurity and lack of every kind of resource. My study setting is far from the earthquake zone but there will be ongoing consequences for the whole country.

My research is among the resilient and wonderful women of Jumla, Nepal. Jumla is in the western mountains, an isolated, exotic district high in the Himalayas with harsh winters, a traditional Hindu patriarchy and few economic resources. The women are subsistence farmers, doing the bulk of the manual labour in the fields, as well as domestic and childcare duties. They value the future - their children - aching for them to have a different life to their own, while lacking the resources in her life. The women all have stories of loss and hardship. Back in Australia, with the assistance of my wonderfully supportive and trusting supervisors, Robyn Richmond and Heather Worth, we designed a Cluster Randomised Trial, including a baseline survey and a participatory intervention in the existing SHGs. Last year, I spent 6 months in Nepal, liaising with the university in Kathmandu and undertaking the field work. This year I go back to do the follow-up assessments, and to measure the impact of the intervention.

There have been many obstacles to overcome – especially with bureaucracy and logistics – and it is a great challenge to work cross-culturally. However, Nepalis are forgiving, tolerant, patient and appreciative which ensures that the work is enjoyable, useful and rewarding.

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Sue Clarke is a PhD student at the SPHCM. Her supervisors are Professor Robyn Richmond and Professor Heather Worth.
Delivering hope to Nepal:  
Day of action and fundraising campaign

Postgraduate students and staff in the School of Public Health and Community Medicine organised a day of action on Thursday 4 June to raise funds for Red Cross Australia to provide humanitarian support to people affected by the earthquakes. The day of action was also aimed at raising awareness about how the earthquake has left thousands of young children, particularly girls, more vulnerable than ever.

The event took place on and around the library lawn and comprised Nepalese cultural activities including dancing, stories and a photograph exhibition, as well as a BBQ and bake sale. The event raised $3,471 from sales and donations on the day and further contributions were expected through online donations as a result of social and other media campaigns about the event.

Many of the Nepalese students involved in the event had suffered directly or indirectly from the earthquakes. UNSW postgraduate student Rejuta Dixit says the fear of briefly not knowing the fate of her family following the April 25 earthquake and its aftermath is something she never wants to experience again. “When I could not get through to my parents and husband on the phone I really started to panic and feared the worst,” she says.

While Rejuta Dixit’s family were among the lucky ones, her husband Kapil Dixit witnessed the collapse of Kathmandu’s Dharahara tower and the deaths of hundreds of people. This left him deeply traumatised. “I don’t want to remember that time but I still think of Nepal as a beautiful place and know that it will rise again,” Rejuta says.

The 7.9 magnitude earthquake, which was followed by numerous tremors, left 7,800 people dead, 15,000 injured and 1.6 million families deeply traumatised and without safe drinking water or shelter. Senior lecturer in UNSW’s School of Public Health and Community Medicine, Dr Patrick Rawstorne says the event generated a great atmosphere and was well supported by the UNSW community. He says: “The photograph display which was complemented by music and dance, enabled people to reflect on the devastation but also to celebrate the coming together of people from different nations in a show of support for the people in Nepal.”

Rakesh Panthi, a postgraduate student from Nepal who helped organise the event, said “I am feeling so proud to be part of UNSW and have friends like you around me. This event was one of the most amazing days I had in my experience. Thank you everyone for your enormous effort. The collective energy of all of our friends, faculties, technical staff, supporting organisation and groups was very productive and very much fun to work with. I learned so much from you all.”

The Head of School, Professor Raina MacIntyre, says UNSW is a global community, and the School is committed to action and advocacy in all aspects of its work, and was proud to support UNSW students and staff in this fund raising event.

More information about the UNSW Action Group and this particular event is available on the School website: sphcm.med.unsw.edu.au/advocacy/nepal-earthquake-relief

Dancing at the event – UNSW library lawn, 4 June, 2015
Xanthe Lawson & Dr Rawstorne, in front of photographic display
Expanding your horizons . . .

Tsetsegsaikhan Batmunkh is from Mongolia and graduated from the medical faculty of the People’s Friendship University in Russia as a medical doctor in 2001. She completed her PhD in microbiology at the same university. Before coming to SPHCM she worked at the Central Laboratory of the Inspection Agency and Public Health Department of the Ministry of Health, Mongolia for 8 years. In 2014 she graduated with a Master of Health Management and Master of Public Health.

During her coursework Tsegi did an internship at the policy and advocacy unit of the Cancer Council NSW (CCNSW), as part of the School’s internship program. Here is Tsegi’s reflections on this internship:

“I undertook a review of national and international peer-reviewed literature, and other evidence sources, related to psychosocial oncology services with the aim of providing CCNSW a report that included recommendations about a model of psychosocial oncology care in NSW cancer services, highlighting potential advocacy issues. I had an opportunity to see how strong research based evidence can support policy and advocacy. In addition to this study, I volunteered to help organise the Biggest International Morning Tea at UNSW for 2 years to raise funds for CCNSW.

Back home, the knowledge gained through this summer internship course helped me to be promoted as a short-term consultant with World Health Organization on the integration of health in Environmental Impact Assessments. Furthermore, the concepts I learned in public health and the critical analytical skills I developed at UNSW allowed me to get a position at the World Health Organization as a program officer on the Expanded Program on Immunization in December 2014.

The internship experience and the fact that cancer is the leading cause of mortality and morbidity in Mongolia, inspired me to initiate a similar non-governmental organization. I established a local NGO named the “National Cancer Council of Mongolia”. This NGO aims to help cancer patients and their families by providing training and information to the community to prevent cancer.

In addition to helping advance my career, my study at SPHCM helped me to expand my social interests. I have been selected to be part of the Women’s Leadership Program, supported by Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This program, organised for the first time in Mongolia, is designed to improve leadership skills of female alumni. Recently, I was elected as a Board Member of the Mongolian Association of Australian Graduates (Mozzies).

I would like to encourage students to utilise all the possibilities offered during their studies to expand their knowledge and experience by participating in conferences, increasing networks, doing the internship program at SPHCM and volunteering.”
In a postgraduate course initiated by the Master of Public Health course convenors Professor Robyn Richmond, Professor Heather Worth and Dr Holly Seale, Masters of Public Health students and medical students were taken to Kenya in 2012 and 2013 to explore public health issues in two Internally Displaced Persons’ (IDP) Camps in the Rift Valley. The students conducted research into the health needs of the IDP camp residents, reflected on the experience of conducting research in a resource-poor setting and considered these health and other human rights issues. In 2013, the research focussed on nutrition, food security and cardiovascular risk factors among the men, and reproductive health and antenatal care among the women.

Following Kenya’s presidential elections of 2007-8, targeted ethnic violence erupted across the country. Hundreds of thousands of people were forced out of their homes, towns and businesses, and they fled across Kenya to avoid the bloodshed. Up to 5,000 people were killed by the mobs, militia and state security agents including the Police and army. Many retreated to Nakuru, 160km north west of Nairobi. The UNCHR distributed temporary tents with a six month lifespan to the 100,000 IDPs who settled in Nakuru. In 2008 the Kenyan Government compensated each family and gave the equivalent of AUD$100 to assist with relocation. Many IDPs, too afraid to return to their destroyed homes, pooled their funds and bought pockets of land around the Nakuru district to rebuild their lives and so established the IDP camps. Many still reside in the dilapidated UNCHR tents today.

The people residing in the IDP camps are exceptionally vulnerable to numerous public health problems related to limited resources, poor sanitation, severe overcrowding, transitory populations, and extremely poor nutritional status. Kenya is also home to one of the world’s worst HIV and AIDS epidemics.

In 2013, the Principal of Springs High School, Duncan Mwangi, generously donated to the course convenors, the use of two of his classrooms for the research to be carried out. Springs High School was established in 2013 for the young people of the IDP camp in Rongai, near Nakuru and is adjacent to Rongai Primary School. The school is prized in the community for having quality teaching. During the UNSW visit, the significant need for a school library became apparent as there was no evidence of any books. After returning from the 2013 research trip, Robyn Richmond and Fran Hyslop began sourcing books to establish the Springs High School Library for the school’s students, in recognition of Duncan Mwangi’s generosity for providing classrooms for us to conduct our study and to provide a much needed resource for the students. To date, we have provided funds for shelving, and sent nearly 2,000 books to stock the library. The photo shows the plaque highlighting the newly established library at Springs High School and the donors, SPHCM and Moriah College. Jo Bloch has provided invaluable assistance in sourcing books from Moriah College, Queens Park. But more books are needed. Duncan Mwangi is seeking high school science textbooks on chemistry, physics, biology, environmental science, and general science. If you have books which you would like to donate please contact: Fran Hyslop: f.hyslop@unsw.edu.au
Empowering patients to reduce hospital infections

“Over the last two years, Dr Holly Seale, A/Prof Joanne Travaglia and Prof Raina MacIntyre from the SPHCM have collaborated with staff from the University of Wollongong and from a major Sydney public hospital to undertake a multiphase study to explore: (1) the attitudes and readiness of hospital patients and staff members towards the concept of patient empowerment; and (2) the receptiveness of hospital patients towards a new empowerment tool aimed at increasing awareness and engagement of patients in preventing healthcare associated infections (HCAI).

HCAI are amongst the most frequent complication in hospitals. These infections are associated with additional costs, prolonged hospital stays, and excess morbidity and mortality. Crude estimates from the World Health Organization (WHO) suggest that one in 10 patients admitted to hospitals are affected by a HCAI. More specifically, approximately seven in 100 patients hospitalised in high-resource countries will suffer from a HCAI, whereas 10 to 15 in 100 patients in low-resource countries will experience a HCAI. The prevalence of HCAI is an important indicator of the safety and quality of medical care.

An approach promoting a culture of safety and HCAI reduction must involve everyone involved in healthcare in the process. By necessity, this must include the patient. Patients’ involvement in their own health care is a function of both what patients do in relation to their health and their interactions with health professionals. In terms of patient safety, one consistent stream of activity has been empowerment programs aimed at assisting both patients and their healthcare providers to remember to ask and perform hand hygiene. Patient empowerment is an integral part of the WHO hand hygiene multimodal strategy.

Although the role of patient hand hygiene as a means of preventing infection has been recommended, patient engagement remains an underused method of preventing HCAIs. Evidence suggests that patient participation does yield positive results, and that most patients are willing and able to not only participate in their own hand hygiene, but also to engage with hospital staff. However, the best approach to empower or engage patients around infection control is still being debated.

This project consisted of three phases in which acquired knowledge was applied as the project progressed. It employed a mixed methods approach which involved qualitative (expert consultations and in-depth interviews) and quantitative methods (surveys) to explore the topic. Surgical patients were the chosen consumer group as research has documented that 30% to 50% of major complications occurring in patients undergoing general surgical procedures are preventable and surgical site infections (SSIs) occur in approximately 2-5% of all surgical procedures.

From the interviews conducted with patients and staff members, it was found that there was virtually unanimous agreement that patients should be thought of as a ‘stakeholder’ and should have a role in the prevention of HCAI. However, the degree of responsibility and or level of system/staff-engagement that the patient could have varied. While very few staff members or patients interviewed had previously been exposed to the concept of empowerment, they accepted the idea and were surprised that hospitals had not yet adopted the concept. Staff members expressed astonishment that it has taken hospitals so long to move away from the “traditionally patriarchal model” of health care. However, they felt that a lack of hospital support, time and staffing would be key barriers to the implementation of any empowerment programs.

Although the WHO and others have recommended that patients have a role in encouraging hand hygiene as a means of preventing infection, patient empowerment/engagement remains an underused method of preventing HCAI. The results of this project suggest that patients would like to be more informed about HCAI and are willing to engage with staff members to assist with the prevention of infections while in hospital. The best strategies to promote patient/HCW engagement and participation in infection control activities will be the focus of further research.
Muru Marri spirits were high during the month of June with three from the unit celebrating their graduations. Dr Megan Williams and Dr Rachelle Arkles received their PhDs and Dr Josef McDonald received a Master of Public Health. To top it off, the Muru Marri team formally received a Vice-Chancellor’s Award for Teaching Excellence in the category of Programs that Enhance Learning. The rare team citation records that Muru Marri’s contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health learning and teaching in UNSW Medicine has grown steadily, since the unit delivered its first Indigenous public health elective a decade ago.

Direct enrolments with Muru Marri in 2014 totalled 82 students, representing a six fold increase since 2010. This growth is largely attributable to the launch in 2012 of a Master of Public Health specialisation in Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing. This involved the addition of two newly developed Aboriginal-specific courses, as well as a renewed elective in Environmental Health. Muru Marri staff also deliver many lectures and sessions in undergraduate medicine and other post-graduate public and international health programs.

The team’s teaching approach is founded on extensive experience and close ties with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, services and communities. Guided by UNSW Medicine’s Elder-in-Residence, Aunty Ali Golding, Muru Marri continuously reflects on, researches and enhances its curriculum.

Innovations in student engagement include creating empowering learning spaces utilising a student cohort approach, and building relationships and trust with students inside and outside the classroom. This teaching pedagogy incorporates critical reflection, as well as the ecological model of health and lifespan perspectives. Muru Marri has shown innovation in blended learning including through storytelling, scenario building, case method tutorials and immersion in the Aboriginal Family Well Being Empowerment Program.

Student learning is reinforced by authentic assessment tasks relevant to their lives, policy contexts and workplaces. These learning processes assist Muru Marri’s students to ‘challenge their lens’ and realise the full potential of their roles in promoting health in empowering ways alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities and among the wider Australian community, as well as internationally.

Recent graduates

**Dr Rachelle Arkles**

Rachelle’s PhD is entitled ‘Between Shadow and Light’: A hermeneutic inquiry of Aboriginal families’ meaningful world of caring, ageing and dementia.

Rachelle is a lecturer with Muru Marri. Her doctoral research was a sub-study of the NHMRC funded, Koori Growing Old Well Study (KGOWS), and was supported by a PhD scholarship from the ARC Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research (AIPAR), now known as the ARC Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research (CEPAR).

Rachelle’s PhD research focused on the experience and meaning of caregiving for family members of an older Aboriginal person with cognitive decline or dementia. Centred on the family caregiver in...
an Indigenous ‘world’ of ageing and dementia, the study turned on what it means to be a researcher in a complex social, cultural and historical environment. "The inquiry was never just about the experience of caregivers looking after frail, older family members as an empirical or cross cultural question", said Rachelle. "Rather, it was at its heart a questioning of how as researchers we reach the experience of others, particularly in a contested post-colonial and conceptual space”.

The study used methods of in-depth conversational interviews with family caregivers, ‘yarning circles’ with carers and community members in a communal setting, and reflexive journal writing. The scholarship was located in the tradition of phenomenology using elements of existential, hermeneutic and narrative analysis and writing techniques. The study has contributed new perspectives and original research in an area of growing public health concern, namely the care of older Aboriginal Australians with dementia, in particular, the experience of family caregivers in urban communities. The significance of this approach in practical terms says Rachelle, is that "it has pointed to the importance of bringing existential awareness into research and professional practice to fine-tune a sense of researcher/practitioner presence as feeling, thinking, reflecting and acting players in our engagement with research participants and the concepts which underpin our research inquiries”.

**Dr Megan Williams**

*Megan’s PhD is entitled Connective services: Post-prison release support in an urban Aboriginal population.*

Megan is a lecturer at Muru Marri and is a descendent of the Wiradjuri peoples of central NSW through her father’s family. Megan’s PhD research was a three-stage grounded theory study of the processes, timing and strategies for support that Aboriginal service providers, family members and Elders use in assisting Aboriginal people to transition from prison to community life, and to prevent reincarceration. In essence, Megan’s research focussed on ‘throughcare’ – exploring the theory and practice that providing support for Aboriginal people exiting prison better prepares them for life in the community and reduces risks for reincarceration, death and poor health and wellbeing.

Megan received Lowitja Institute student research funds to support her PhD research. Her research was also supported by the Indigenous Offender Health Capacity Building Grant at the Kirby Institute’s Justice Health Program.

Megan continues to research Aboriginal leadership to reduce prison rates and promote health equity. She is currently involved with the NHMRC Centre for Research Excellence in Immunisation in Under Studied and Special Risk Populations, designing a qualitative study among Aboriginal men, particularly those with low levels of access to services and previous contact with the criminal justice system.

**Dr Josef McDonald**

Josef is a graduate of UNSW Medicine in 2011 and in the same year received the Muru Marri Undergraduate Merit Prize. He was a recipient of the Sabina Ross – Slater Memorial Medical Scholarship and in 2014 was appointed a trustee of the Shalom Gamarada Ngiyana Yana residential scholarship program. Josef began his internship with the Hunter New England Health Service in 2012 and enrolled in the MPH in 2013. Josef has been an Associate Lecturer (Conjoint) with SPHCM for several years and has played key roles in the medicine program in the design and delivery of Indigenous CMT’s and in the Master of Public Health through contributions to our Indigenous electives. Josef’s research interests include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. He has published on the topic of men’s groups and their potential to support patients engaged with mainstream mental health services.

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**Let’s hear from you**

We would like to keep in touch with former staff and students of the School. Please send your contributions to the editor Kevin Forde: k.forde@unsw.edu.au

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