SPHCM launches a new MPH program in India

The School of Public Health and Community Medicine (SPHCM) launched a new Master of Public Health program in India in November 2016. This program was developed with an aim to contribute to public health workforce development in India.

India is home to an estimated 1.26 billion and the sub-continent is grappling with numerous public health problems. Both communicable diseases (including emerging and re-emerging diseases) and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are on the rise. Rising internal migration from rural to urban areas, dense population especially in urban areas, changing lifestyle are all attributed to the crises. The penurious public health system is grappling with poor infrastructure and inadequate numbers of trained public health staff. Public health training is the need of the hour, but there are limited public health training institutes in the country to bridge this gap.

Recognising this need with our partner Apollo Health, SPHCM launched an India specific Master of Public Health (MPH) program, the MPH (International) or MPHI. The MPHI will be offered to resident Indian nationals. The program will be offered predominantly in distance mode. Face-to-face mode will be an option for interested candidates who prefer to experience our campus for summer courses. SPHCM has partnered with Apollo Medvarsity to market this program in India following our successful collaboration in delivering Fellowship programs in Infectious diseases and Epidemiology and Biostatistics programs. Apollo Medvarsity will also offer the capstone Internship program through their rural health program (Total Health Program) in Aragonda, Andhra Pradesh India.

"The new Master of Public Health (International) program reflects these shared goals and builds on our considerable mutual strengths in health and education. I look forward to growing these enduring links between Australia and India."

Professor Ian Jacobs – President and Vice-Chancellor UNSW Sydney

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The program is the first of its kind being offered by an Australian university in India. UNSW Sydney President and Vice Chancellor, Professor Ian Jacobs launched this program in Mumbai in November 2016. The program was attended by several dignitaries including Dr Prathap Chandra Reddy (Founder, Apollo Hospitals Group) Dr Preetha Reddy (Vice Chairman, Apollo Hospitals Group), Sangita Reddy (Managing Director, Apollo Hospitals Group), Prof Raina MacIntyre (Head, SPHCM), Mr Laurie Pearcey (Executive Director, UNSW International) and Dr Padmanesan Narasimhan (Program Director, MPH).

Quotes

“At Apollo and Medvarsity we are always looking for the best education partners that can add value to our doctors and healthcare professionals. This partnership between Apollo Medvarsity and UNSW brings an exceptional, globally recognised masters program to India. Through this course our students can also apply for jobs with global organisations including the World Health Organization and UNESCO.”

Ms Sangita Reddy – Managing Director, Apollo Hospitals Group

“The new Master of Public Health (International) will help address the growing shortage of public health professionals in India. The flexible program is delivered fully online and face-to-face so that busy clinicians can keep working as they achieve this qualification. They can retain their job and get a UNSW degree, while still attending our school in Sydney.”

Professor Raina MacIntyre – Head of School, Public Health and Community Medicine, UNSW

“We have a huge demand for online learning, and in a rapidly changing world this is the future of education. UNSW and Medvarsity have both recognised this need, and our partnership brings together the very best of both institutions to improve the public health workforce in India.”

Dr Padmanesan Narasimhan – Program Director, MPH (International), SPHCM

Professor Yunus delivered an inspiring lecture to a packed auditorium in UNSW on the 4th of April 2017. This was his only public lecture on his visit to Australia. The President and Vice-Chancellor Professor Ian Jacobs welcomed him to UNSW and noted that UNSW as a global university has similar aspirations towards the wider community.

The Yunus Social Business Health Hub (YSBHH), located within the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at UNSW Sydney, was launched on 20 March, 2015. It serves as a hub for global engagement and operates as a technology, research and development group that enables social businesses to develop effective, problem-solving enterprises in health, education and renewable energy.

Current work at the YSBHH focuses on E-health and social aspects of health in the developing world, led by Prof Teng Liaw; youth in vulnerable and disadvantaged areas led by Dr Anne Bunde-Birouste, and social business research initiatives in the following areas: ‘Social business: theory and concept’, ‘Technology and social business’, ‘Social business in disadvantaged community’ led by Dr Mahfuz Ashraf. Dr Ashraf is also developing an undergraduate course on Social Business and Health to be offered in late 2017.

Photos: Above: Dr Prathap Reddy was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Medicine conferred by UNSW President and Vice-Chancellor Prof Ian Jacobs; Top: Dr Narasimhan with Professor Ian Jacobs

Photo: Professor Muhammad Yunus and President and Vice-Chancellor Professor Ian Jacobs
What motivated you to carry out research in Global Health?

While I was undertaking a MIPH at UNSW, I did some volunteer work with a school teacher friend in Nepal where we checked the health and nutrition status of school children and was surprised by the frequency of discharging ears (chronic suppurative otitis media, CSOM). The principal shrugged and explained 'the mountain children have bad ears', as though the cause was altitude or, perhaps, fate, and resistance futile. CSOM is a disease of poverty and its determinants: malnutrition, overcrowding, lack of access to clean water and sanitation, education and health care. Globally, chronic ear infections are the commonest cause of preventable deafness and early treatment is simple, inexpensive and widely available. This seemed an ideal topic for research, for someone who believes that health is a human right. This motivated me to explore the topic by writing a research proposal in Prof Heather Worth’s Research Methods course (which I highly recommend for anyone considering a PhD). The background prevalence of CSOM in Nepal was reported as 5-8%, well above the 4% WHO defined public health emergency level. I could not find research on community based interventions in Nepal and few in other low income countries.

Encouraged by my supervisors, Professors Robyn Richmond and Heather Worth, I enrolled in a PhD. I was fortunate to receive the SPHCM Domestic Research Scholarship. I mainly used the scholarship to cover my research expenses in Nepal, such as flights, accommodation, equipment, visas and interpreter wages. I continued to work 2 days per week as a GP when in Australia.

What were the highlights of the journey in your PhD?

I first conducted an exploratory qualitative study interviewing women in the remote mountain district of Jumla – famous for its cold winters, steep mountains and the extremely difficult lives of its women, who struggle to grow food for their family and care for their children. Despite this, I found Jumla women were resilient – they were pragmatic in their use of health care, they embraced change and they told me how much they valued their women’s self-help groups and the many new things they had learnt together. I used this information to design a participatory intervention that would be acceptable and appropriate to them and published my protocol (See Clarke S; Richmond R; Worth H; Wagle RR, 2015, ‘A study protocol for a cluster randomised trial for the prevention of chronic suppurative otitis media in children in Jumla, Nepal’, *BMC Ear, Nose and Throat Disorders*, vol. 15, dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12901-015-0017-x).

Back in the field, I ran village clinics for children, performing a health check, examining their ears and offering treatment of any current ear infections, as well as surveying their mothers. Next, I adapted the WHO ear care training and delivered it in half of the women’s groups. Finally, a year later I asked the women what they knew, and checked the children’s ears again.

I collected the first mountain village based prevalence data in Nepal, as well as collected detailed demographic data. Although there was no statistical difference between the intervention and control groups at follow-up, overall there was a 30% reduction in children with CSOM and I am really happy with that outcome. Once I complete my thesis, I plan to return to the field to explain the outcomes to the participants and seek their feedback.

The PhD has been an extremely enjoyable and challenging experience. My field work, in a remote mountain district, was beset with difficulties and I only intermittently had phone or internet contact with my supervisors. Whenever I did have internet my supervisors were at hand offering guidance and perspective. Despite the difficulties, I loved being in the field and having to make all of the decisions and rely on my
Arts on Prescription is a highly successful aged care program implemented by HammondCare, in partnership with the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, and UNSW Art+Design. The program is funded by the Australian Government under an Aged Care Service Improvement and Healthy Ageing Grants grant (2015-2017.)

Arts on Prescription is based on a growing body of research evidence which supports the positive role that participatory arts has in improving the health and wellbeing of older people, including people challenged by chronic disease, anxiety and depression, social isolation, frailty, recent bereavement, carer burden and people living with memory problems. The idea behind the arts ‘prescription’ is to emphasise to participants that their health care professional sees involvement in the arts as an important tool, alongside their traditional health care, to help them achieve wellbeing. The program embraces positive ageing and is consistent with Australia’s National Arts and Health Framework.

Since August 2015 HammondCare has run over 50 Arts on Prescription Programs promoting healthy and active ageing through participation in the visual arts, music, drama and movement. There has been enormous interest in the program evidenced by more than 1.3 million views of our program video on Facebook.

Save the Date

UNSW will showcase Arts on Prescription through an exhibition to be held in the foyer of the Wallace Worth Building. The official opening will be on Wednesday May 3rd, between 5:00 pm and 6:30 pm, and include a short discussion on the role of arts in health and aged care. Original art created in the program will be on display, and one of the Arts on Prescription music bands will provide background music while drinks and canapes are served. Professor Raina MacIntyre will be among special guests to open the event. We encourage all staff and students to attend to show support to our older artists.

For more information on Arts on Prescription video see: youtu.be/rDRj5GzPbvE and www.facebook.com/artsinageing/
Professor Robyn Richmond has been awarded a Doctor of Science for her research in treatments for nicotine dependence and public health approaches to tobacco control and in reducing alcohol consumption among people drinking at unsafe levels.

Higher Doctorates are the highest academic award conferred by the University of New South Wales. Robyn is the first woman to have been awarded the DSc by submission of a discourse since the records began in 1993. Robyn is the only public health academic in Australia to have been awarded a Doctor of Science by submission of a discourse.

The criteria for a Doctor of Science states they are awarded on “the basis of a significant body of published scholarly work that establishes the graduate as a distinguished authority in an area of research, commanding worldwide recognition... Higher doctorates are rare and are awarded for independent and original research that constitutes a substantial and distinguished contribution to knowledge in a field.”

Robyn has been carrying out research on treatments for smoking cessation for three decades. Since the early 1980s she has conducted research into treatments for tobacco smokers in different settings including general practice, workplaces, hospitals, the prison system and Indigenous communities. Over this time, more than 31,000 participants have been recruited to her smoking teams’ studies, either as subjects or deliverers of the smoking interventions. This includes over 1130 general practitioners, 144 practice nurses and 18,555 patients from 410 general practices in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, ACT, NT and WA. With her team, she has conducted training workshops for GPs in Australia, New Zealand and in other countries, training around 12,500 GPs in her smoking cessation program so that they can assist their patients to quit smoking.

Over the past 15 years Robyn and her research teams and higher degree students have targeted reduction of tobacco use among disadvantaged people with high risk lifestyle behaviours including people with a mental illness, prison inmates and Indigenous persons. She has conducted research among more than 11,000 participants from disadvantaged populations including over 600 people with a mental illness from 10 treatment clinics in Sydney, Melbourne and Newcastle; around 500 prisoners from 31 correctional facilities across NSW and Queensland; over 1000 indigenous people from communities in NSW and the Northern Territory; and more than 5000 high risk employees in workplaces across Australia. With research students she has researched smoking policies in 148 local government councils in NSW; and conducted a longitudinal study of the extent of teaching about tobacco and smoking cessation programs in 1376 medical schools around the world.

SUMMARY OF Achievements

As a recognised leader in studies of treatments for tobacco smokers, Professor Robyn Richmond’s achievements include:

- Conducting the first series of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) in Australia (and second in the world) to show that general practitioners (GPs) have an important role in helping smokers to quit tobacco use.

- Demonstrating that the workplace is an important context to deliver smoking cessation and other healthy lifestyle interventions (first series of studies in Australia and among the earliest research in the world)

- Conducting the first RCTs in the world to illustrate that people with severe mental illness can be assisted to stop smoking.

- Studies in the prison system, which contains high proportions of Indigenous people, those with a mental illness and drug users, as a setting to assist smokers to quit tobacco use (first RCTs in the world conducted among male prisoners).

- First studies in Australia to show the effectiveness of use of nicotine replacement therapy (tablets and gum) to assist smokers to quit in general practice.

- Demonstrating that teaching medical students about tobacco can improve knowledge about tobacco control and understanding of smoking cessation techniques on a global scale (first series of studies in the world).
The launch of UNSW Vaccine & Infection Research Lab on 28 March, 2017 was a one-off unveiling, curated by Professor Raina MacIntyre, Head of School and program lead for the elderly vaccines program.

The launch was held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Coogee. There was a fantastic audience who attended the event, including academic experts, policy makers and national and NSW media.

The goal of UVIRL is to bring together bright minds to give talks that are idea-focused, and on a range of subjects, to foster learning, inspiration and action – and provoke conversations that matter about adult vaccinations.

UVIRL Mission statement
To reduce the immunisation gap between adults and children through research, teaching and advocacy, with a special focus on the elderly, high risk and vulnerable populations.

Who we are
We are a group of academic researchers based at SPHCM UNSW, who are recognised international leaders in immunisation and vaccinology research.

Our primary area of focus is adult and high risk group immunisation, with a focus on vulnerable populations including the elderly, migrants, refugees, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, immunosuppressed people and health workers.

Our research expertise spans clinical trials, epidemiology, mathematical modelling, health economics, big data and data linkage, social and behavioural research, as well as policy and evaluation. We engage in research, advocacy and teaching, with several options for higher studies in infectious diseases and vaccinology.

For more information see: creimmunisation.com.au

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Dr Heather Gidding
NHMRC Career Development Fellowship Advanced population-based methods to evaluate and inform immunisation policy and practice 2017-2020, $425,048

A/Professor James Wood (CIA), Dr Heather Gidding (CI)
NHMRC Project Grant on Assessing acellular pertussis vaccine effectiveness: integrating transmission models, genetics and cohort data to inform policy 2017-2019, $429,597

Professor Robyn Richmond (CI)
in Professor Richard P Mattick (CIA)
NHMRC project Grant on Adding an electronic-cigarette to standard behavioural treatment for low-socioeconomic status smokers: A randomised trial 2017-2020, $1,381,127

Professor Siaw-Teng Liaw (CI)
in Dr Blanca Gallego Luxan (CIA)
NHMRC project Grant on Enabling personalised cohort studies from large repositories of clinical practice data 2017-2019, $520,967.50

Professor Siaw-Teng Liaw (CI)
in Professor Mark Harris (CIA)
NHMRC project Grant on Preventing chronic disease in patients with low health literacy using e-health and teamwork in primary health care 2017-2020, $1,264,892.50

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Launch of UNSW Vaccine & Infection Research Lab (UVIRL)

Photo: Selected members of UNSW Vaccine & Infection Research Lab
The School of Public Health and Community Medicine (SPHCM) is the first school at UNSW to participate in collaborative teaching in the PLuS Alliance. The PLuS Alliance, a tripartite partnership between The University of New South Wales (UNSW), Arizona State University (ASU) and Kings College London (KCL) aims to combine teaching and research strengths to develop solutions to global challenges. As part of this innovative vision, in November 2016 the SPHCM provided the first opportunity under the PLuS Alliance for ASU students to enrol in two courses, ‘Bioterrorism and Health Intelligence’ and ‘Health Aspects of Crises, Emergencies and Disasters’ offered in the School’s Summer Session.

Both courses were reviewed to ensure they could meet the diversity of students and the expected standards for PLuS Alliance courses.

‘Bioterrorism and Health Intelligence’ convened by Professor MacIntyre, Dr Muscatello and A/Professor Heslop had been designed and developed in 2015 in anticipation of a global range of students and delivered as a face to face and external course. ‘Health Aspects of Crises, Emergencies and Disasters’ which was delivered only in face to face mode in the Summer School in collaboration with the WHO was enhanced by A/Professor Heslop with new online features in readiness for the PLuS Alliance delivery.

Given the importance of this initiative, Dr Lois Meyer, the Senior Research Fellow for Postgraduate Courses in the School initiated and conducted a process evaluation for both these pilot PLuS Alliance courses. The aim was to determine if there was a need for any changes while the courses were being run as well as to better understand the experiences of the students given these were the first pilots in the Alliance. In both courses it was found that there was strong value and satisfaction in learning across both institutions and sharing understandings across both countries. The value of the PLuS Alliance in terms of collaborative learning is captured in this quote from the evaluation.

“...The experience of interacting with others across the world was so invaluable, I can’t put into words how much I appreciated the opportunity to be part of this class. While it meant some very late nights for me to be part of the live schedule in Australia, it was worth it and part of the overall experience. It was great to be able to share concepts through the online chats and live discussions in real time, and gain perspective from the widest audience possible than just in the silo of information that is the USA. Thank you for the class!”

ASU student in Bioterrorism and Health Intelligence

A seminar was arranged at the T.H. Chan School of Public Health, with the support of Women & Health Initiative and the Department of Global Health and Population, the Harvard University on 17th November, 2016. The seminar was delivered by Jasim Anwar, doctoral candidate of the SPHCM, UNSW Sydney, Australia. He was invited by the Women Health Initiative, the Harvard University to spend four week of his candidature as visiting researcher student during November 2017.

He delivered the seminar titled ‘Challenges of Maternal and Perinatal Mortality Surveillance in a rural district of Pakistan’, and highlighted the major findings of his research project on maternal and perinatal mortality surveillance in Pakistan. The seminar was well received by the staff and student at Harvard University.

We would like to keep in touch with SPHCM graduates and to hear from you. Update your contact details so that we can connect with you. Take the SPHCM survey so that we can better understand your current role and interests.

Visit SPHCM Alumni: sphcm.med.unsw.edu.au/about-SPHCM/sphcm-alumni
Symposium on Resilient Health Systems and Universal Health Coverage

A/Prof Rohan Jayasuriya was on an invited panel of speakers at the Symposium on Resilient Health Systems and Universal Health Coverage chaired by Sir Anand Sathyanand, Chairman Commonwealth Foundation. His talk on ‘Resilience and Mental Health: findings from a national study in Sri Lanka’ were based on a recent study of mental health in Sri Lanka. The other notable speakers on the panel were Professor Sir Michael Marmot, President World Medical Association who spoke on Inequalities and health – a multisector approach and Dr Solaiman Juman, President of the Commonwealth Medical Association.

The research was based on a study which is the largest and most nationally representative study in the post-conflict field in the world. The first results of this study were published in The Lancet Psychiatry: Jayasuriya D, Jayasuriya R, Tay AK, Silove D. Associations of mental distress with residency in conflict zones, ethnic minority status, and potentially modifiable social factors following conflict in Sri Lanka: A nationwide cross-sectional study, The Lancet Psychiatry 2016. 3(2): 145-153. The Symposium was part of the Commonwealth Medical Association 24th Triennial Conference held 14 – 16 October 2016 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

PhD student Alex Cardenas wins research award

Congratulations are in order at the School of Public Health and Community Medicine after Alexander Cardenas won second place at the prestigious Australian and New Zealand CAA Awards for his PhD study supervised by Professor Raina MacIntyre and Associate Professor Joanne Travaglia.

The Membership of the CAA includes the principal providers of ambulance services in every State and Territory in Australia and in New Zealand and the annual awards for excellence represent the highest achievement in Paramedicine from the CAA.

Alex’s PhD, titled ‘Impact of Education, Demographics and Professional Culture, on Paramedic Infection Control Decision Making’, designed and tested two brand new online cardiac arrest simulators and tested them on a sample of over 1,100 paramedics.

This study demonstrated the potential of online simulation to train and assess clinical decision making and the significant difference in clinical decision making across paramedics of different age backgrounds, genders, educational attainment and geographical location.

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 Dr Rohan Jayasuriya: r.jayasuriya@unsw.edu.au. Layout and design by Christine Rousselis: c.rousselis@unsw.edu.au.

Published by the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

Opinions expressed in the articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of New South Wales. Information was correct at the time of publication but is liable to change. Please visit the School website for the latest information: sphcm.med.unsw.edu.au