Announcing our latest TCRN PhD Scholarship Top-up recipients

We are very pleased to announce the Round 2 recipients of the 2012 TCRN PhD Scholarship Top-up Awards.

The TCRN has awarded five new PhD Scholarship Top-up Awards to students undertaking cancer-related research projects within the Faculty of Medicine at UNSW. Three first-year PhD candidates, one second-year candidate and one final-year candidate now join the existing seven TCRN PhD scholars who received our inaugural competitive awards in February 2012. We are excited to support a growing group of students throughout their research, and look forward to providing a strong foundation of support services, including opportunities for professional development and the mentoring and expertise of experienced translational cancer researchers within the TCRN.

3-year $5,000 PhD Scholarship Top-up plus $5,000 research support

- Sean Ma: *The role of ROR2 in colorectal cancer*
  
  Sean’s research into the role of ROR2 and the Wnt signalling pathway in the progression of colorectal cancer (CRC) will elucidate the effect of this developmental pathway on the cancer cells. If Sean’s hypothesis – that ROR2 is responsible for increased tumourigenesis and metastasis in CRC – is supported through his research findings, ROR2 may prove to be an important target for therapies designed to prevent the spread of CRC.

- Leonardo Pasalic: *Pathogenesis of thromboembolism in cancer: neutrophils, tissue factor and microparticles*
  
  Leo is researching the links between the coagulation system and malignancy, in order to understand the biology of cancer-related thrombosis. He aims to discover predictive biomarkers of thrombotic risk in cancer patients – allowing the identification of high risk groups that would benefit from primary venous thromboembolism prophylaxis.

- Eric Qiao: *Characterising the origins, functions and identity of mesenchymal stem cells at sites of embryonic haematopoiesis*
  
  Mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs) have been identified in multiple adult organs and are believed to play a major role in tissue repair in the adult. Eric’s research will provide the knowledge required to identify and understand the function of MSCs in developmental haematopoiesis. His research outcomes may have valuable therapeutic application in the further development of treatments for haematological disorders, such as leukaemia.

2-year $5,000 PhD Scholarship Top-up plus $3,000 research support

- Melissa Desouza: *Defining the role of tropomyosins in apoptosis*
  
  Melissa aims to discover the mechanism of action of a novel anti-tropomyosin compound (TR100) that was developed previously within her laboratory in the School of Medical Sciences, UNSW. TR100 is a unique, actin filament-specific compound that targets a sub-set of tropomyosin filaments expressed only in tumour cells. Understanding the mechanisms by which TR100 induces tumour cell death will enable researchers to determine how anti-tropomyosin compounds can be integrated with existing therapies for melanoma and neuroblastoma to increase drug effectiveness.

Final-year $5,000 PhD Scholarship Top-up

- Janet Long: *Network structure and the role of key players in a translational research network*
  
  Janet’s project will describe the structure of a new translational research network in Australia and explore the role of key players within the network: their actions and the opportunities and constraints they face in maximising collaborative effort and planned outcomes. Janet’s research utilises a social network approach, which examines the relationships between network members rather than their individual attributes (such as expertise or skill sets). Findings will have significant application to guiding the future management of translational research networks and optimising their operations and impact.

Further details of the research of all TCRN PhD Scholarship Top-up recipients can be found on the TCRN website here.
Building a sustainable clinical research system

The UK Clinical Research Facility (CRF) Network aims to identify, develop and share systems for the delivery and management of operational activities across the UK clinical research and experimental medicine infrastructure. Their 8th Annual Conference was held in July 2012 in Dublin, with the theme: “International Collaborative Clinical Research and Global Health”. The conference provides an excellent opportunity to network with staff from clinical research facilities and to gain an understanding of their continuing evolution to meet the changing needs of researchers. With the support of a TCRN ‘Bridging the Gap’ Conference Grant, I was able to take advantage of this opportunity in 2012.

This year’s UK CRF Conference provided a coherent overview of the UK National Health Research System and how the components of this system synergistically work towards advances in translational research. The National Health Research System places the interests of the patients and public at its core, with four key components that were defined as:

- **A faculty** of prominent leaders of clinical and applied health and social care research
- **Leading edge research**, focussed on the needs of the patient and the public
- **Systems** of research management and research information that both facilitate research and safeguard patients
- **Infrastructure** providing the support and facilities required for world class research, including clinical research networks, translational research centres and clinical research facilities.

The conference highlighted the need for strengthened links in research funding processes, in order to ensure that each of the system’s components are provided with the necessary support to ensure an uninterrupted research cycle.

During the conference, we heard from researchers from a wide range of clinical disciplines (psychiatry, infectious diseases, cystic fibrosis, medical imaging) who each provided examples of how the support of the research infrastructure facilitated their research. One such example presented was the Cambridge Bio-Resource – a resource of over 12,000 healthy volunteers and patients willing to provide DNA and health data for research studies investigating the links between genes, the environment and disease. This case study illustrated how the availability of key infrastructure for recruitment, patient access and tissue access facilitated program success. The program, developed through a collaboration incorporating university (Cambridge), government (National Health Service [NHS] Blood and Transplant), non-profit organisations (Wellcome Trust and the Sanger Institute), and the NIHR-funded Cambridge Biomedical Research Centre, also demonstrates the strength of combining the expertise and resources of a range of stakeholders.

The UK health research system is maintained by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) – a government entity established in 2006 to deliver the ‘Best Research for Best Health’ national health research strategy. Primary aims of the NIHR include:

- attracting, developing and retaining the best research professionals to conduct people-based research;
- driving faster translation of basic science discoveries into tangible benefits for patients and the economy; and
- increasing the opportunities for patients and the public to participate in, and benefit from, research.

The UK CRF Conference highlighted NIHR achievements to-date, including increasing NHS funding of clinical grade academics, doubling participant recruitment to NIHR Clinical Network Portfolio studies and attaining high-levels of NHS staff participation in their Good Clinical Practice training program – a comprehensive program which aims to provide the foundational skills and knowledge for clinical staff to practice safely and responsibly in the research field. The NIHR has also injected funding into two Translational Research Partnerships and 11 new Biomedical Research Centres.

The National Health Research System has embedded research as a core performance indicator of NHS institutions and transformed how health research is supported and funded. It is evident that the changes achieved in the UK would have been unimaginable before the current health system reorganisation that began there in 2005. Given the apparent differences in health care funding and government structures between Australia and the UK, direct transposition of such a strategy would be difficult to conceive. However the progress achieved by these efforts certainly provides both valuable lessons and a stimulus for the continued development of effective and sustainable clinical research systems in Australian health services.

**Member spotlight: Theresa Ledger**

Theresa Ledger was recipient of a TCRN ‘Bridging the Gap’ Conference Grant for attendance at the UK Clinical Research Facility Annual Conference, held in Dublin in July 2012. Theresa is the Cancer Trials Network Manager responsible for all Cancer Trial Units within South Eastern and Illawarra health districts. She possesses over 23 years’ experience in clinical trials conduct, both as a clinical research nurse and in research management and governance. Theresa has presented and advised nationally on preparing for regulatory Good Clinical Practice (GCP) inspections, has published a career framework for clinical research nurses, and is currently an expert reviewer for a GCP course developed by Imperial College London.
TCRN biobanking projects – Banking today for the future of cancer care

The TCRN membership should be aware that biobanking is one of our major initiatives and a core component of this has been establishing the TCRN’s biobank, which is known HSA Biobank, hosted by the Lowy Biorepository at UNSW.

The aims of the HSA Biobank are to 1) provide a streamlined process for the universal collection of biospecimens with linked clinical data from consenting cancer patients undergoing treatment and diagnosis, and 2) design processes for consenting and collection that are embedded in routine hospital procedures, and that have minimal impact on clinical, surgical or diagnostics services. Neither aim would be possible without the partnership, ongoing commitment and support of the Anatomical Pathology Department of the South Eastern Sydney Laboratory Services (SEALS).

Together the partners have commenced this project at the Randwick campuses of the TCRN’s founding institution hospitals. Once the processes are functioning efficiently and embedded in routine hospital practice, implementation will be explored in other hospitals within the TCRN.

In addition to the TCRN / SEALS partnership, the long term impact of the HSA Biobank is heavily reliant on commitments from senior surgeons on the Randwick campus and the buy-in from a variety of staff across the implementing hospitals. There are close to fifty people working to ensure the novel initiative that is the HSA Biobank is a resounding success.

The latest HSA Biobank update:

The HSA Biobank is currently consenting patients from the Prince of Wales Hospital, Royal Hospital for Women and Prince of Wales Private Hospital.

Over 350 tissue and blood samples have been collected from consenting patients with a range of cancers since the HSA Biobank commenced in April this year, including gynaecological, breast, bowel, urological, soft tissue and haematological tumours.

Gillian Scott, PhD
Translational Cancer Research Fellow

Gillian’s role in the TCRN will focus on projects that promote the translation of cancer research findings into improved patient health outcomes through advanced diagnostics and integration of research and diagnostic practices.

Gillian comes to the TCRN after more than 15 years’ experience in scientific and clinical virology research at UNSW and the South Eastern Area Laboratory Services, Prince of Wales Hospital, with expertise in the translation of scientific and clinical research to development of molecular diagnostic assays, better treatment protocols, identification of disease biomarkers, and increasing awareness of the impact of drug resistance on patient outcomes.

Dr Lucy Wyld
Translational Cancer Research Fellow

Lucy is a Medical Oncology Advanced Trainee clinician from the UK with particular research interests in colorectal cancer and cancer of unknown primary. Lucy will be undertaking several translational cancer research projects throughout her TCRN Fellowship, including the evaluation of the clinicopathological features of large serrated polyps by analysing a large cohort of colorectal specimens and endoscopic images from Prince of Wales and Westmead hospitals; a systematic review of the molecular characteristics of serrated polyps; and a retrospective analysis of the management of patients with cancer of unknown primary. She brings valuable clinical experience to the Operations & Projects Team and will also contribute her medical expertise as a member of the 2012 Cancer Challenge of the Year Project Advisory Group.

Katie Denholm
Biobanking Opportunity Project Manager

Katie joins the TCRN as the Biobanking Opportunity Project Manager – leading a project aiming to embed the opportunity for tissue biobanking into routine patient care by developing a template for standardised application throughout NSW public hospitals.

With a background in pharmacology, Katie holds 6 years’ experience in science research, encompassing laboratory, pharmaceutical, university and hospital-based experience both in Australia and the UK. For the last 3 years, Katie has worked in Phase I oncology clinical trial coordination, and brings strong project management skills, together with skills in ethical and regulatory aspects of clinical research, to the TCRN.

TCRN Operations & Projects Team welcomes new members

Over the last two months the Operations & Projects Team has grown, welcoming three new members who will expand and strengthen the activities of the Network.

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Have you logged into the TCRN website?

WE ARE HERE ➤ www.tcrn.unsw.edu.au

The member portal of the new TCRN website is a highly valuable resource within which you can share your professional interests and achievements with other members; search the network for specific expertise or research interests; log activities including publications, grants awarded, and congresses attended; and submit event notifications, resource requests and grant applications.

Each TCRN member has a unique member portal username and password. Any member who has not been provided with their initial password should contact the Operations & Projects Team immediately: tcrn@unsw.edu.au

We ask that all members update their public profile page and account details with as much information as possible – this is one of the most direct ways to share your skills and expertise with other members, and potentially identify and pursue new collaborations.

How to update your member profile

1. Go to www.tcrn.unsw.edu.au
2. Click on 'Member Login’ on the dark grey navigation bar at the top of the screen.
3. When prompted, enter you unique username and password to enter your member home page.
4. Click ‘+ Edit my public profile’ to enter your expertise, interest areas and a short note about yourself. Once saved, this information will only be visible to other members of the TCRN.
5. Click ‘+ Edit my account details’ to update your contact details, upload a profile picture, and change your password.

Our website is designed to serve as the central ‘hub’ of the Network: the more information you share, the more the site will work for you.

Please direct any website enquiries or troubleshooting issues to tcrn@unsw.edu.au

CURRENT FUNDING OPPORTUNITY:
TCRN Conference & Professional Development Grants, Round 2 2012

Applications for Round 2 of the 2012 TCRN Conference & Professional Development Grants are now being accepted.

Eligibility:

The Round 2 2012 TCRN Conference & Professional Development Grants scheme is designed to encourage:
- TCRN members working in clinical cancer health settings, and
- PhD students who are supervised by a TCRN member
to acquire new knowledge in cancer research-related activities, and to share this knowledge with the broader TCRN community.

Available grants:
• National conference & professional development: up to $1,000
• International conference & professional development: up to $3,000

Full details of the eligibility criteria and award requirements can be found on the TCRN website Funding pages here.

Applicants should ensure that you understand the requirements and conditions of these awards before applying by reading the grant guidelines carefully.

Applications close 4pm Friday 26 October 2012.

The Health-Science Alliance 1st Annual Scientific Symposium: Science and Health for Women in 2012


WHERE: Royal Hospital for Women Lecture Theatre, Level 1, Women’s Health Institute, Randwick. Click here for a site map (Building 17).

REGISTRATION: http://www.thehealthsciencealliance.org/symposium

The Health-Science Alliance (HSA), Australia’s first Academic Health Science Centre, represents a unique partnership between 14 independent entities, co-located at the Randwick Hospitals campus. Members include the TCRN and two of our Founding Institutions – the Prince of Wales Hospital and the Royal Hospital for Women.

The theme of the inaugural Scientific Symposium of the HSA is ‘Science and Health for Women in 2012’. The symposium also marks the anniversary of 100 years of antenatal care in Australia.

There is no charge for attendance at this event but registration is required as numbers are strictly limited.

For further information, please contact Cristina Kennett, UNSW Medicine on email c.kennett@unsw.edu.au, or telephone 02 9385 8632.