

## Tasmania's 'silent killer'

Kidney disease is a killer – often deemed the 'silent killer' because of its ability to cause significant damage to the kidneys long before a patient notices any symptoms.

At the Menzies Research Institute our researchers are keen to investigate the causes of kidney disease and to explore improved means of detection, prevention and treatment for sufferers.

The research team led by Dr Matthew Jose has studied data collected from more than 360,000 Tasmanians over a 13 year time frame, in an attempt to identify the prevalence of chronic kidney disease (CKD) in the community.

While many of us may associate chronic disease with the elderly, at times chronic disease can hit the young and healthy.

Old Beach resident Kylie McCulloch was diagnosed with kidney disease at just 24 years of age. One week before her wedding she noticed she had severely swollen ankles and after a trip to the doctor and a kidney biopsy, she was given the devastating news that her kidneys were failing.



Despite the difficulties, Kylie became pregnant during her dialysis and gave birth to her beautiful daughter, Madison.

As Kylie's condition worsened, she found herself starting dialysis. She continued the gruelling in-hospital treatments three times a week for three years.

Dr Jose and his team are studying the prevalence and treatment of CKD in Tasmania and results have shown an alarming increase of disease in the Tasmanian population. There is some good news however, research has shown that early intervention with lifestyle and medications can significantly reduce the incidence of kidney failure.

"Tasmania has a relatively high prevalence [of CKD], at around 11 per cent for females and nine per cent for males. Despite this our dialysis rate remains among the lowest in Australia. Kidney disease is associated with a high mortality, and perhaps many people are dying rather than reaching dialysis. Detection of chronic kidney disease has increased significantly over the last 13 years.

"The prevalence [of CKD] differs geographically within the state and is highest in the North West. Tasmania will spend more than \$130 million on dialysis treatment over the next 10 years.

"We therefore need to find ways to detect kidney disease early, prevent the progression of kidney disease and find ways to stop it happening to the next generation," Dr Jose said.

As Kylie's kidney function continued to decline, she urgently required a kidney transplant. Today, after receiving the transplant, Kylie says she feels her life is back to 'normal'.

Our researchers at Menzies are looking forward to the opportunity to make inroads into the diagnosis and management of kidney disease in the Tasmanian community and help others like Kylie.

*"If you have health, you probably will be happy, and if you have health and happiness, you have all the wealth you need, even if it is not all you want."*

~ Elbert Hubbard.

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# Director's message



Professor Simon Foote

Welcome to the final edition of *The Bulletin* for 2009. It has been a rewarding year for Menzies and we are looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that 2010 will bring.

In this our summer edition, you will learn about kidney disease and the impact it has on the Tasmanian community. Dr Matthew Jose is leading the research into the treatment and prevention of this disease and we have featured him in our member profile this issue.

You will also read about our recent Art of Christmas event – a roaring success by all measures – and all the details about the big move into the new building.

We have received wonderful feedback about our new website and I hope you have had the opportunity to explore the site and learn about our research and the people that make it all possible.

The final celebrations for our 21st anniversary will be at the symposium and dinner in December. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to reflect on all the successes of the past and to welcome in a new era of exciting medical research.

A prime example of our new successes is our very own Rhea Longley. Rhea has been named the 2010 Rhodes Scholar and on behalf of Menzies, I would like to extend huge congratulations to her and wish her success in her future endeavours.

I hope that 2009 has been a rewarding year for you all and we at Menzies look forward to your continuing support in the years to come. Please enjoy this edition of *The Bulletin* and I look forward to seeing you in 2010.

*S Foote*

## Major prostate cancer gene discovery



Menzies' Dr Jo Dickinson is a member of the international prostate cancer research group called PRACTICAL

Researchers at the Menzies Research Institute, in collaboration with an international prostate cancer research group called PRACTICAL, have contributed to the discovery of seven genetic markers linked to men's risk of developing prostate cancer. The study was recently published in the prestigious scientific journal *Nature Genetics*.

This new ground breaking research has the potential to lead to improved diagnosis, prevention and treatment for prostate cancer.

**Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australian men after non-melanoma skin cancers, and will affect one in eight Tasmanian men.**

Menzies researchers formed part of an international team of scientists led by researchers at the Institute of Cancer Research (ICR) in the UK and the University of Cambridge. The team analysed variations in the genomes (*A genome is the total genetic information available in a cell*) of almost 38,000 men and found seven regions in the genome that increase the risk of developing prostate cancer.

One of the genes, NKX3.1, could be useful as a new target for treating prostate cancer. It helps control how cells die and when damaged can be a key element in developing cancer.

Drugs called HDAC1 inhibitors, that play a similar role to this gene, are currently in clinical trials and this research could help doctors target this treatment to men with variations in the NKX3.1 gene.

Another gene, ITGA6, could also be a potential target for new drugs. It plays an important role in cell growth, movement and survival and when overactive it is associated with some prostate cancers.

Menzies' Dr Jo Dickinson, Senior Research Fellow and Member said working together with such a large group of researchers enables significant breakthroughs to be made which will facilitate the development of advances in diagnosis and treatment of these complex diseases.

"Our participation in such a significant discovery also raises the international profile of Menzies and the Tasmanian community," Dr Dickinson said.

The collaborative team examined the genetic differences in 19,879 men with prostate cancer and 18,761 healthy individuals – using data from 21 studies worldwide including eight from Europe, nine from North America, one from China, and three from Australia. This looked at differences in over 43,000 SNPs, pieces of DNA that vary between individuals.

This research takes the total number of regions of the human genome associated with an increased prostate cancer risk to over 20.

The prostate cancer research team at Menzies includes Dr Jo Dickinson, Dr Jim Stankovich, Dr Briony Patterson, Dr Russell Thompson, Annette Banks and Professor Simon Foote, who are all members of the International Prostate Cancer Genetics Consortium.

Prostate cancer research at Menzies is proudly supported by the Australian Cancer Research Foundation (ACRF) through the establishment of the Tasmanian Inherited Cancer Centre, and through the Cancer Council Tasmania.

## Supporting research from the heart

The Menzies Research Institute has teamed up with Heart Foundation Tasmania to create an Honours Scholarship valued at \$10,000 for talented young Tasmanian researchers to develop a life-long interest in cardiovascular disease. This year's winner is Georgia Siltman.

Georgia has been researching type 2 diabetes at Menzies. Georgia's research investigates whether defects in muscle blood flow is a factor in insulin resistance. People with diabetes are at increased risk of developing heart disease and results from this project have the potential to change the way diabetes is treated and prevent some forms of cardiovascular disease.



Georgia Siltman receiving her award from Heart Foundation Tasmania CEO, Graeme Lynch, at the Heart Foundation Ball

We look forward to a long and rewarding partnership, with Heart Foundation Tasmania and our congratulations go to Georgia for her success as the inaugural scholarship winner.

# Expanding our horizons up north

While Menzies is expanding in Hobart, with new buildings, new staff and new research themes, we were recently thrilled to have the opportunity to join with Calvary Health Care Tasmania to consolidate our activities in Launceston.

In September, Menzies started operating out of our new Launceston premises at the St Vincent's campus of Calvary Health Care Tasmania. Calvary Health Care Tasmania has generously donated rooms for the ASPREE participant based study. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to call upon the talents of researchers and supporters in the north of the state.

ASPREE is a controlled trial of low dose aspirin for healthy ageing. Aspirin may reduce the progression of diseases such as dementia and cardiovascular disease, leading to a better quality of life for individuals and their families. Low dose aspirin has been shown to prevent further strokes and heart attacks in people who have already had one. It has also been shown to protect people who have not had a heart attack or stroke but who are at increased risk.

Menzies' Director, Professor Simon Foote said that Menzies is essentially a Tasmanian Icon and is interested in the health of all Tasmanians.

"Many people from the North and North-West of the state already participate in Menzies studies and this collaboration with Calvary Health Care Tasmania will provide greater access for these people, who are interested or already involved

in our important medical research studies," Professor Foote said.

"With rapid expansion underway and the near completion of the new Menzies building in Hobart, this is an exciting opportunity for the Menzies to grow throughout Tasmania."

"Menzies values its partnership with Calvary Health Care Tasmania and it is heartening to see hospitals extending their interests beyond their role as healthcare providers. We are grateful to Calvary Health Care Tasmania for their support in this endeavour and we look forward to a long and productive collaboration in Launceston," Professor Foote said.

Calvary Health Care Tasmania's Director of Operations, Mr Grant Musgrave said that Calvary is very pleased to support the expansion of Menzies Research Institute into Tasmania's north.

"Menzies shares Calvary's commitment to the Tasmanian community and to excellence across its operations, and we are certain this collaboration will be very successful and productive," he said.

Menzies' Senior Member, Professor Mark Nelson who heads up the ASPREE study said that the new Launceston-based centre will enable people from the north of the State, who are already involved in the participant based ASPREE study, greater access and quality of service.



From left: Rosie Beardsley – Director of Clinical Services Launceston, Mr Ronald Bezzant, ASPREE study participant, Professor Simon Foote, Director, Menzies Research Institute, Mr Grant Musgrave, Director of Operations, Calvary Health Care Tasmania and Professor Mark Nelson, Senior Member, Menzies Research Institute.

"The ASPREE study, which has been running in Tasmania since 2005, will now have a clinic operating out of our Launceston centre three days a week," Professor Nelson said.

The ASPREE study has also recently benefited from an injection of funds to the tune of US\$50 million from the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health, the peak health funding body in the United States. This support follows earlier funding of \$3.5 million from the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia.

These funds will allow Menzies researchers to continue their important collaboration with other Australian researchers and health professionals into the investigation of the benefits of aspirin in healthy ageing.

## Researcher profile: Dr Matthew Jose

**What is the current focus of your research?**

My research is focussed on four key areas in chronic kidney disease: the causes of kidney disease and how to prevent progressive decline in function; chronic kidney disease in Tasmania and the availability of services; the function and varieties of dialysis treatment; and kidney disease in Indigenous Australians.

**What are some of the recent findings from your work?**

We have recently published two major papers. In the first paper we have shown that Indigenous people who donated their kidneys to relatives did not do as well as expected and developed kidney disease themselves. This work has just been published in the New England Journal of Medicine. The second paper reviewed long term data showing a large number of Tasmanians have chronic kidney disease,

especially in the North-West of the state, and this number is increasing rapidly.

**What is the biggest challenge in your area of research?**

Developing a good test to allow early identification of people with kidney disease. The earlier we can diagnose people, the better we will be in delaying its progression.

**What is the most interesting aspect about your work?**

I enjoy getting to work with many different people. Kidney disease affects people of all ages and from all backgrounds.

**What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?**

I like to keep active with running, bike riding and travelling in the bush – either by foot in Tasmania, or by 4WD through outback Australia.



Dr Matthew Jose

# Menzies' student 2010 Rhodes Scholar recipient

Menzies is proud to announce that our very own Rhea Longley is the new Rhodes Scholar for 2010. Rhea is an honours student at Menzies and has an undergraduate degree in Medical Research from the University of Tasmania.

Rhea's honours project involves finding a new gene involved in malaria resistance in mice. Her research interests are in genetics and infectious diseases. Rhea has been studying under the supervision of Professor Simon Foote, Dr Brendan McMorran and Dr Gaetan Burgio.

Describing herself as "optimistic, driven and caring", Rhea said she has always been interested in health, in particular diseases affecting developing countries.

The Rhodes Scholarships were created under the will of Cecil John Rhodes in

1902 and are awarded for academic excellence and all-round good character. This scholarship will allow Rhea to study at the famous Oxford University in the UK next year. She plans to undertake a PhD in genetic research, focusing on host resistance to malaria in humans.

"I would like to use what I have learnt from my research, and utilise the research of others, to lead the planning and direction of programs in developing countries," she said.

"My goal is to achieve a high leadership role within a prominent non-government organisation or the World Health Organisation, to oversee the management and implementation of health programs to control and monitor infectious diseases and improve general health and well-being."



Rhodes Scholar recipient, Rhea Longley with her father Tony Longley

## Thank you to our valued supporters

Thank you to all of our donors for your ongoing financial support and commitment to Menzies.

Listed below are *new* individual and community supporters of Menzies for August 2009 to October 2009:

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Diabetes Tasmania

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Mr Clive Pearce

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# A joint venture supporting the community

The John Holland Group, one of Australia's largest and most successful specialists in construction contracting has again joined forces with Fairbrother Pty Ltd, Tasmania's leading joinery and construction company, for the building of our stage two project.

The joint venture will have a parallel affiliation with the Tasmanian community. The new project will heavily support local people and businesses, with the majority of suppliers and contractors for the new project being Tasmanian.

The development of stage two will secure over 250 construction jobs for Tasmanians over three years, plus work for some 20 Tasmanian professionals, such as architects and engineers over that period

The John Holland Fairbrother Joint Venture has kindly shown their support for the valuable research we do here at Menzies, in building a healthier future for the community, by becoming the principal sponsor of our 21st Symposium and Dinner, which will be held this month.



Clinton Mead, Todd Marsden, Mark Hallsworth, Mike King and Ron Gifford



John Holland - Fairbrother Joint Venture

## the Art of Christmas 2009

On Thursday 5 November, the fifth annual Art of Christmas event was held at the Bond Store, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. The evening was once again a roaring success and our thanks go out to everyone who supported this major fundraising endeavour for the Menzies Research Institute and the Royal Hobart Hospital Research Foundation.

The spaciousness and rustic ambiance of the historic Bond Store was greatly appreciated by our guests, and most enjoyed the opportunity to view the artwork with a glass of bubbly, and to stroll around the courtyard enjoying the sumptuous food and the fine evening. The delightful music of our violin duo from Strings on Fire topped off an evening charged with great atmosphere.

We were thrilled to have the ABC's Andy Muirhead as our MC for the night and very fortunate to secure the services of experienced auctioneer, Hank Petrusma.

This year's art featured 13 Tasmanian artists, including Louise Bloomfield, Tony Flowers, Patrick Grieves, Nigel Lazenby, Cathy McAuliffe (Phat Flats), Rebecca Murdoch, Hilton Owen, Georgie Pajak and Michael Weitnauer. We welcomed four new artists to the event this year, namely Stuart Clues, Julian Thompson, Jenni Klaus and Peta Riddell (from Wise Guise). A huge thank you to all the artists involved for their generous

donation of magnificent artwork.

In addition to the sale of artwork, we also had many of the artworks turned into designer Christmas cards. These were available for sale on the evening and can still be purchased through Menzies, the Royal Hobart Hospital Research Foundation and at Fullers Bookstore. Please see our website [www.menzies.utas.edu.au](http://www.menzies.utas.edu.au) for more details on purchasing your cards or any of the remaining artwork for sale.

The success of the event would not have been possible without the generous support of our sponsors. We would like to thank our major event sponsors: Cascade Brewery, Spicers Paper, Print Applied Technology, Red Jelly, Mailhouse Tasmania, Taste Catering and The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

We would also like to express our deepest appreciation to the following sponsors: Art Poster, Corporate Express, Eye Spy Signs, Strings on Fire, Staging Connections, The Quarry and Flora Gondwana.

We are also grateful to all the volunteers who helped out on the night. Many thanks to everyone involved and to all those supporters who came along and enjoyed the atmosphere. Funds raised from the night contribute to vital medical research in Tasmania.



2009 Christmas Cards now available for purchase



Menzies Research Institute

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[www.menzies.utas.edu.au](http://www.menzies.utas.edu.au)



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## Menzies awarded NHMRC funds



Biostatistician and Menzies' Member,  
Dr Jim Stankovich

The Menzies Research Institute has once again been highly successful in the acquisition of medical research funding through the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

In partnership with the Tasmanian Government, Menzies and several UTAS schools received \$856,000 to assess the effectiveness of a major workplace health and wellbeing initiative, the Healthy@Work program.

Workplaces are increasingly being used as important settings for health promotion interventions to improve health, prevent chronic disease and improve workforce productivity.

Chief investigator of the project, Menzies' Associate Professor Alison Venn said the Partnership Project aims to review the effectiveness of the Healthy@Work program currently being delivered to all Tasmanian State Service employees and to guide the development of future programs.

"This Partnership Project will combine the expertise of investigators from the Menzies Research Institute and University

of Tasmania with health and policy practitioners in the Tasmanian Government," Associate Professor Venn said.

The Menzies Research Institute has also attracted a total of \$3.5 million in funding from the latest round of NHMRC research project grants.

Seven research project grants were received that will help researchers better understand diseases such as Alzheimer's disease, multiple sclerosis, osteoarthritis, chronic arthritis and malaria.

"Menzies performed exceptionally well in the latest funding round, with the outcome testament to Menzies' world class medical research," Director of Menzies, Professor Simon Foote commented.

"More than 28 per cent of applications from Menzies' researchers were funded, which is above the national average of 23 per cent."

Dr Jim Stankovich received a \$286,000 grant for his research into *Identifying rare genetic variants conferring susceptibility to multiple sclerosis (MS)*.

Recently there has been success in identifying common genetic variants that confer susceptibility to multiple sclerosis. The variants that have been discovered so far have modest effects on risk of disease, and only explain a small proportion of familial aggregation of disease.

Dr Stankovich's study aims to identify rare genetic variants that have strong effects on the susceptibility to multiple sclerosis, with the goal of reducing the high incidence of MS in the Tasmanian population.

## Packed and on the move

They say good things come to those who wait. Well, we've been waiting since 2005 and now good things are definitely happening – yes, we are finally on the move. Staff and students from the Menzies Research Institute and the Health Science Faculty of the University of Tasmania are packed and ready to move in to the new building in December.

After many years of expansion in terms of both staff and research projects at Menzies, we are excited to have the opportunity to house all our staff together under one roof in our dedicated new building. We are coming together from five different Hobart locations and it is expected the move will take place over an eight week time frame. The official opening of the new building, however, will not take place until early next year.

As stage one comes to a close, it is exciting to see plans for the stage two

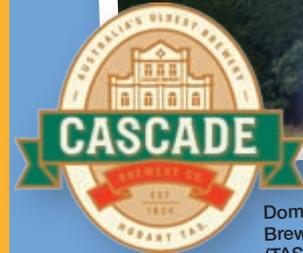
development are well underway, with a feasibility study for the project completed. Advocate House, another historic building with strong heritage value on the site, has the potential to be restored and incorporated into the project.

The \$90 million project, which will hold a Green Building Council of Australia five star Green Star rating, will be developed on the adjacent site to the newly completed Medical Science 1. There will be integration between the two buildings within the Medical Science Precinct.

The Lyons (architectural and consulting) team are working on Medical Science 2 to ensure architectural and design continuity with Medical Science 1.

We look forward to bringing you updates on the new building in the next edition of *The Bulletin*.

## Serving the community



Dominic Bury, Cascade Brewery Regional Manager (TAS) outside the historic Cascade Brewery, Hobart

The Cascade Brewery has been a proud supporter of the Menzies Research Institute for many years. The Cascade Group has supported many of our annual fundraising ventures, including The Art of Christmas, since its inception in 2005. Due in part to the generous donation of beverages and their ongoing support, the Art of Christmas remains the main fundraising event on the Menzies calendar.

The Cascade Group not only supports worthy causes such as medical research in Tasmania, they heavily support our local primary producers by purchasing approximately 900 tonnes of apples, 500 tonnes of blackcurrants and 100 tonnes of raspberries annually from around the state to produce their non alcoholic beverages.

Mr Dominic Bury, Cascade Brewery Regional Manager (TAS) says the company takes its role of being a responsible corporate citizen very seriously, with a strong focus on supporting local Tasmanian people and organisations.

The Cascade Brewery has gone on to become an iconic company within the Tasmanian community and is a highly recognisable brand all over the world. Menzies is also considered a Tasmanian icon and like the Cascade Group, we are working at having our name instantly recognised all over the world as a Tasmanian institution.

Corporate sponsorship is a key component of the success of the Menzies Research Institute and we are very grateful to the Cascade Brewery for their ongoing support of our valuable research.

# Gifts in memory and in honour

## In Memoriam

August – October 2009

We gratefully acknowledge gifts made in honour of:

Mr Justin Luke Appleby  
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**"One sentence in your Will can fund life-saving medical research. Remember Menzies Research Institute in your Will"**

If you would like more information please contact Barbara Zimmerman on 03 6226 7782 or email [Barbara.Zimmerman@menzies.utas.edu.au](mailto:Barbara.Zimmerman@menzies.utas.edu.au)

Bequests save lives by funding research.

Thank you!



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