

## Menzies research among nation's best



Dr Kristy Sanderson accepts her award from Professor Michael Good AO, Chair of the Council of NHMRC

Outstanding medical research at Menzies Research Institute Tasmania has been recognised nationally with the naming of one of its researchers among Australia's top 10 health researchers for 2011.

The work of Menzies' Dr Kristy Sanderson was recently featured in the NHMRC (National Health and Medical Research Council) *Ten of the Best Research Projects 2011*.

The *Ten of the Best Research Projects 2011* recognises NHMRC-funded researchers who excel in their field and who are finding solutions to some of Australia's greatest health challenges.

The research projects for 2011 were chosen from among the thousands of NHMRC-funded medical research projects underway in Australia today. They are picked on the basis of the strength of the science and significance of outcomes.

The inclusion of Dr Sanderson's work on depression and anxiety in the workplace demonstrates the consistently high calibre of work undertaken by Menzies researchers.

The Mental Health Council of Australia estimates that each year one million Australian adults and 100,000 young people cope with depression. The majority have jobs and careers. Should they front up to work when depression hits or stay home until they are feeling better? Dr Kristy Sanderson's research team decided to find the answer.

Dr Sanderson's project found that people with depression may benefit more from participating in work rather than calling in sick.

"This is the first analysis of its type in the world for a chronic disease in the workplace," says Dr Sanderson.

Dr Sanderson says the study gives people with depression guidance that 'working through it' may be advisable.

"There can be benefits to keeping on working when you are sick, not just in terms of earning an income and keeping your job, but also the mental health benefits from continuing with the routine and social support of working.

"This is the first time such a recommendation has been made with evidence behind it."

The study also found that 'presenteeism' would be less costly for employers than 'absenteeism' but each case has to be assessed individually.

Dr Sanderson's team is now seeking to supplement these findings by investigating the balance between what is best for the employee and what is best for the employer.

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### Would you like to receive the Bulletin via email?

If you would be happy to receive the quarterly *Bulletin* newsletter via email rather than in hardcopy, please let us know by confirming your details with Phoebe via email at [phoebe.sargent@menzies.utas.edu.au](mailto:phoebe.sargent@menzies.utas.edu.au) or by phone on 6226 7707. Not only will it help us reduce our costs, it is the most environmentally friendly option.

# Director's message



Professor Alison Venn,  
Acting Director

Welcome to the autumn issue of the *Bulletin* newsletter, 2012.

In this issue we shine the spotlight on some of Menzies' best and brightest researchers. Dr Kristy Sanderson and her research into depression and anxiety in the workplace was recently named one of the *Ten of the Best Research Projects* for 2011. Outstanding research like Dr Sanderson's is contributing significantly towards improving health outcomes for working Australians and I congratulate Dr Sanderson and her team for this important work.

In this edition, you will also read about Dr Verity Cleland and Dr Steve Simpson, Jr. who recently were both formally recognised by the University of Tasmania for their research excellence over the last 12 months. Dr Cleland's work is primarily focused on understanding the physical activity behaviours of population groups at high risk for physical inactivity and subsequent poor health, and Dr Simpson's research interests rest in multiple sclerosis epidemiology and sexually transmitted diseases.

Applications for the position of Director of Menzies Research Institute Tasmania closed in early March. The Institute anticipates an appointment being announced by mid-2012. I am happy to let you know that there has been strong interest from some impressive potential applicants. I look forward to keeping you posted.

## Fire-smoke important contributor to deaths worldwide

Fire scorches 350 to 400 million hectares of land worldwide every year – an area the size of India – emitting greenhouse gases as well as fine particulate matter that can be harmful to human and animal health.

Landscape fire-smoke comprises emissions from wild and prescribed forest fires, tropical deforestation fires, peat fires, agricultural burning and grass fires. These emissions affect both climate and air quality. The health impacts of landscape fire-smoke are rarely highlighted in discussions about fires – until recently.

New research published in *Environmental Health Perspectives* estimates that worldwide landscape fire-smoke caused around 340,000 deaths a year between 1997 and 2006.

Chief investigator for the study, Menzies' Dr Fay Johnston, says that most emissions originate from fires set in tropical rainforests and savannas, where they cause recurrent episodes of severe pollution that affect some of the poorest regions of the world.

The Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia were the hardest hit by fire-smoke deaths, with an estimated annual average of 157,000 and 110,000 deaths, respectively, attributable to landscape fire-smoke exposure.

"Results also showed that deaths related to landscape fire-smoke more than doubled during El Niño years compared with La Niña years," Dr Johnston said.

"Fires are becoming more widespread and frequent in some regions, and this source of air pollution is likely to continue to grow in magnitude and cause consequent health impacts.

"Poor health outcomes associated with fire-smoke, for example, could be considerably reduced by restricting the deliberate burning of tropical rainforests, which rarely burn naturally.

"It's time to look at deforestation impacts on fires, which in turn affect human health.

"These are avoidable deaths. There's an opportunity here for us to save lives," she said.

Co-author on the paper, Professor David Bowman from the UTAS School of Plant Science, says that reducing population level exposure to air pollution from landscape fires is a worthwhile endeavour that is likely to have immediate and measurable health benefits.

"Such interventions could also potentially provide benefits for the slowing of global warming and the loss of biodiversity," Dr Bowman said.

"Furthermore, the large influence of El Niño on deaths attributed to landscape fire-smoke implies that the burden may change in the future if climate change modifies the El Niño Southern Oscillation or drier conditions occur in places with adequate fuels and ignition sources.

"This highlights a risk to populations residing in flammable landscapes should severe fire activity abruptly increase due to climate change."



Fire-smoke emissions can be extremely harmful to human health credit (© Jenny Rollo)

To all of our supporters, thank you for your generous and ongoing contributions. Without your passion and commitment we would not be able to continue our world-class research.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Alison Venn  
Acting Director



## Follow us on Twitter

Menzies is now on Twitter!

Follow us @ResearchMenzies to receive our latest research breakthroughs and news.

## The detail is in the devil

Scientists looking into the Devil Facial Tumour Disease (DFTD) affecting Tasmanian devils have uncovered surprising new facts about the genetic make-up (genome) of this unique transmissible cancer that is threatening a whole species with extinction.

Researchers sequencing the complete genomes of two DFTD tumours, from devils located on Tasmania's north coast and Tasmania's south coast, found that the DFTD first arose in a single female devil. Although this devil is now dead, her DNA is still alive in the genome of DFTD.

Chief investigator, Dr Elizabeth Murchison, from the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute in the UK, explained that the goal of the research was to understand the genetic changes that first caused DFTD to arise, and to use genetic markers to characterise the cancer's evolution and spread.

"The DFTD is unusual in that it is a cancer that survived beyond the death of the devil that spawned it by adapting so it can be transmitted between hosts," Dr Murchison said.

"It is actually one cancer that has spread throughout the population."

The genomes of the Tasmanian devil and the DFTD cancer are very important from the perspective of conservation of a threatened species, as well as for the insights they may provide into the origins and evolution of a cancer that can adapt in this way.

"The research results found DFTD is a relatively stable cancer and has fewer



Dr Liz Murchison with one of the devils out at Bonorong Wildlife Park

mutations than some human cancers. This indicates that cancers do not need to be very unstable in order to become transmissible," she said.

Dr Murchison said devils have a similar number of genes to humans and more than 400 genes are mutated in DFTD. These include mutations in three genes that are known to be involved in human cancer.

Further work is required to understand how these mutations caused the cancer.

Co-author, Menzies' Associate Professor Greg Woods, went on to explain that as DFTD spreads across Tasmania the number of mutations increase, producing different tumour subtypes.

"We have found evidence that one tumour subtype has overtaken others on the Forestier Peninsula on Tasmania's south coast. This suggests that this tumour subtype may have evolved a genetic advantage.

"Devils can also simultaneously carry more than one DFTD genetic subtype. This indicates that being infected once does not protect devils from subsequent infections of DFTD."

## Public talks a hit with the community

Menzies' free public talk series got off to a great start this year with an outstanding turnout to our first talk on mental health research.

'Mental Health in the Spotlight', held in late February, saw around 100 attendees make the trip into Menzies to hear about our latest research.

Held in partnership with *beyondblue*, three highly-regarded researchers presented their work on mental health. With lots of questions, and even some laughter, the night had a dynamic atmosphere.

Menzies Acting Director, Professor Alison Venn, says she was delighted with the turnout.

"It is truly wonderful to see so many members of the Tasmanian community come into the Institute to hear about our research. It is clear there is a keen interest in our work and a demand for the information to be shared."

The next talk in the series will highlight Menzies' research into cancer and is sure to provide some key insights into the latest research findings.

We encourage you to put the date in your diary:

**Cancer Research Public Talk  
5.30pm, Wednesday 23 May, 2012  
MS1 Lecture Theatre  
17 Liverpool Street, Hobart**

(Enter building on corner of Liverpool and Campbell Streets and report to main reception)

All welcome to attend. Doors open at 5.00pm with light refreshments available before the 5.30pm start.

## Takeaway food and type 2 diabetes

A new study has found that eating takeaway food regularly can increase the risk factors for developing type 2 diabetes.

A nationwide study, involving researchers at the Menzies Research Institute Tasmania, has found that women who eat takeaway food at least twice a week have more risk factors for developing type 2 diabetes than women who eat takeaway food once a week or less.

Risk factors include higher fasting glucose, and a higher HOMA score, which is a measure of insulin sensitivity (how well the body can remove glucose from the blood stream).

The study found a similar pattern for men but the effect was weaker.

Menzies' Dr Kylie Smith says the study demonstrates the importance of a healthy diet and limiting takeaway food.

"We suggest people limit the amount of takeaway food that they eat to once a week or less or choose healthier options," Dr Smith said.

"Takeaway food tends to be high in kilojoules (or calories), saturated fat and salt, and low in other nutrients – but there are healthy alternatives. Takeaway foods which include lots of vegetables, fruit, wholegrain breads and cereals and moderate amounts of lean meat are good options."

Examples of healthier options include:

- salads – with low fat dressing
- sandwiches with wholegrain/wholemeal



Maintaining a healthy diet reduces your risk of developing type 2 diabetes

bread, lots of salad, small amount of lean meat, low fat cheese, low fat dressing

- sushi without, or with only a small amount of soy sauce which is high in salt.

"Maintaining a healthy body weight or losing weight and keeping it off will help reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Eating a healthy diet and being physically active are important for weight loss and weight maintenance."

"The good news is that if you improve your diet you can reduce the risk of getting type 2 diabetes," Dr Smith said.

# 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 November 2011 – January 2012:

## New Individual Donors

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Ms Michelle Robertson  
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Mrs Bev & Mr Eric Woodcock

## New community support

Caring Hands Craft Group  
Hobart Latin Fiesta  
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Mallana (Tas) Pty Ltd  
St Brendan-Shaw College  
Sunshine Tennis Club  
Tasmanian Police Charity Trust Inc  
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## Menzies healthy community fund

*Honours scholarship program*  
Diabetes Tasmania

## Listed below are our Everyday Angels – our supporters who make regular gifts to Menzies.

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Ms Barbara White  
Mrs Margaret Williams

The Menzies Research Institute Tasmania is deeply indebted to ALL our generous supporters who kindly donated in 2011 and in 2012. A full list of all our supporters for 2011 and 2012 is available on our website under [www.menzies.utas.edu.au/about-us/supporters](http://www.menzies.utas.edu.au/about-us/supporters).

Thank you.

## Entertainment Books are back

In 2012 Menzies will again be selling the ever-popular Entertainment Book. Pre-order your new Tasmanian 2012/2013 Entertainment Book now and save huge amounts of money on food and entertainment around Tasmania.

The Entertainment Book contains hundreds of 25-50% off discount vouchers and two-for-one offers from popular restaurants, cinemas, hotel accommodation, the arts, and sporting events.

At the same time, you'll be helping raise money for Menzies' research with \$12.00 from every sale directly supporting us. Books cost only \$60.00.

Books will be available from mid-April.

For enquiries please contact Menzies reception on (03) 6226 7700 or email: [reception.msp@utas.edu.au](mailto:reception.msp@utas.edu.au)

Order your Entertainment Book today



## Win an Entertainment Book!

Would you like to win a brand new 2012/2013 Entertainment Book?

Sign up to receive the Bulletin via email before the end of April 2012 and you will automatically go in the draw to win a new 2012/2013 Entertainment Book.

To enter the draw, email Phoebe at [phoebe.sargent@menzies.utas.edu.au](mailto:phoebe.sargent@menzies.utas.edu.au) and let her know you would like to start receiving the Bulletin via email. The lucky winner will be notified by email in early May. Good luck!

## A legacy that lasts

Peter Worrall, the Director of Worrall Lawyers in Hobart, has been a supporter of Menzies for many years. Worrall Lawyers specialise in Estate Planning and is regarded as one of Tasmania's leading will writing practices.

As Peter says; "the essence of our practice is advising clients with legal issues that arise about their assets. We purposefully maintain this narrow focus in order to provide better and more specialised service to our clients."

Peter believes that at the time someone is having their will written there is a role for a lawyer to play in encouraging a client to perhaps consider and reflect on whether they might like to make a provision for a charity. "Clients will generally choose a charity or not for profit organisation that is close to their family interests or for personal reasons," Peter said.

Recently, Worrall Lawyers informed us that the late Mrs Jean King had left a significant proportion of her estate to Menzies – a bequest of almost \$320,000. Mrs King had advised us over four years ago that she had included Menzies in her will as she believed the Institute was engaged in valuable health and medical research.

Mrs King had a very personal interest in our work, her husband had died from a cardiovascular condition and her only son died from complications arising from diabetes.



Menzies' Sam East receives a cheque from Peter Worrall, Director of Worrall Lawyers on behalf of the late Mrs Jean King, who left a generous gift to Menzies in her will

Mrs King asked specifically in her will that Menzies name the research projects assisted by her gift, in memory of her late husband and late son, Mr Henry King and Mr Robert King respectively.

Menzies will honour this request and is indebted to Mrs King for leaving a bequest in her will to Menzies. Such generosity is truly visionary.

## Sneak peek at new TV commercial

Have you heard of the saying "never work with animals or children"? Well we decided to ignore these wise words and produce a brand new television commercial starring a gorgeous 10-month old baby boy, named Ollie.

The concept for the new commercial is simple – by donating today you can help us to build a healthier and happier future for generations to come. We hope this fresh new commercial will inspire more Tasmanians to get behind us and support our research.

Keep an eye out for its premiere in May on Channel Seven, 7Mate and 7Two.

If you would like to get a sneak peek preview, check out our website at: [www.menzies.utas.edu.au/TV](http://www.menzies.utas.edu.au/TV)



Ollie, the star of Menzies' new TV commercial

## Shaving heads and raising eyebrows

Megan Mundy and Leith Aylett caused a bit of a stir and raised some eyebrows on the North West Coast when they both decided to do the big head shave and raise money for Menzies Research Institute Tasmania.

Megan and Leith are both members of the Penguin Leo Club which is affiliated with Lions Australia International and boasts to be the oldest active service club in Australia. It has been chartered for over 42 years and, since then, has been actively involved in the Central Coast/Penguin community.

It was agreed by them both that all funds raised would go to cancer research at Menzies and they decided to do some goal setting. If they raised \$500 Leith would shave his head and if they got to \$1000 Megan would also shave her head.

Apparently raising funds initially was very slow and it didn't look like they were going to get to the first goal of \$500, but then something kicked in and their community rallied. Before they knew it they had raised \$1585 and both heads of hair were up for a shave!

So, at the T1 201 District Lions Convention in Triabunna last year Leith and Megan had their heads shaved in front of hundreds of members.

Menzies is always phenomenally grateful for the support from the Tasmanian community for its research and this is such a wonderful example of our community's generosity of spirit for the work we do at the Institute.

If you have an idea for a community fundraiser of any sort and want to discuss it, please feel free to contact Phoebe Sargent, our Communications and Development Officer by emailing [phoebe.sargent@menzies.utas.edu.au](mailto:phoebe.sargent@menzies.utas.edu.au) or phoning 03 6226 7707.



Megan and Leith after the great shave

## Researcher profile: Dr Verity Cleland

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

Within a behavioural epidemiological framework, my research aims to understand the individual, social and environmental influences on physical activity. My work has a particular focus on population groups at high-risk of physical inactivity and subsequent poor health – those living in rural areas, those experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, women and children.

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

I have been analysing and reviewing intervention studies that aim to increase physical activity among socioeconomically disadvantaged women. We examined whether a whole range of factors made a difference to effectiveness. We found that the common element of effective interventions is that they are delivered in a group setting. This is an important finding as we can make direct recommendations that programs for this population group include a group component.

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

Unfortunately more than half of Australian adults do not achieve the recommended 30 minutes per day, five days per week of physical activity. It is estimated that if all Australian adults met national physical activity guidelines, one third of heart disease deaths would be prevented, along with a quarter of diabetes cases, a quarter of colon cancer deaths, up to 12 per cent of breast cancer risk, and approximately 15 per cent



Dr Verity Cleland

of ischaemic stroke risk. So trying to get more than 50 per cent of the adult population to change their behaviour by incorporating more physical activity into their day is one very difficult task!

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

I find trying to understand behaviour – what makes people tick – really interesting. I get to talk to a really broad range of people about their experiences, and the barriers they face to being active. I also get to work with some dedicated and passionate government and non-government organisations such as the Tasmanian Premier's Physical Activity Council and the Heart Foundation. This work makes me feel that my research is having a real impact on policy and practice.

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

I keep active by going for walks and playing squash. But I also love to indulge in cooking and relaxing on the couch with a trashy novel or magazine.

## Medical Science 2 well underway

Building work is well underway for the new Medical Science 2 building (MS2) which will be essential for Menzies' continual growth and expansion. The contractor is currently erecting the formwork for the level 6 (top) floor slab. The basic building 'shell' structure is programmed for completion in May 2012. Work is also well underway for the lecture theatre structure at the Liverpool Street end of the site.

The contractors are currently several weeks ahead of schedule, which will provide a buffer and ensure the project is completed on time, if not beforehand. MS2 is scheduled for completion by 31 January 2013.

The giant on-site 'tower' crane will be removed shortly after Easter, once all the façade panels are in place and the constant heavy lifting has been completed. Remaining heavy-lifting works will then be undertaken by the use of mobile cranes.



Medical Science 2 is scheduled for completion by early January 2013

## Recognising research excellence

Each year Menzies rewards and recognises staff and students who have made an outstanding contribution in the area of research over the last 12 months.

The prizes are awarded on the basis of excellent research achievement indicated by: journal articles published or accepted for publication; grants awarded; conference presentations; and honours and awards.

Dr Verity Cleland was awarded The Early Career Postdoctoral Fellow Prize and Dr Steve Simpson, Jr. took out The Postgraduate Student Prize.

Among the highlights of Verity's year were eight peer-reviewed papers published (four as first author) and three competitive small

grants awarded to develop new projects. Her academic achievements and community contributions have also been recognised in the last 12 months with a



Dr Steve Simpson, Jr. and Dr Verity Cleland

Tasmanian Young Tall Poppy Science Award and the Vice Chancellor's Award for outstanding research performance by an early career researcher. Dr Cleland's work has a particular focus on population groups at high-risk of physical inactivity and subsequent poor health.

Dr Steve Simpson, Jr., whose main research focus is multiple sclerosis (MS) and sexually transmitted diseases, published eight papers (six as first author) last year and was awarded the MS Research Australia Young Investigator Award. Steve was also awarded his PhD with no revisions required to his thesis.

# More than Flowers



## In Memoriam November 2011 – January 2012

We gratefully acknowledge gifts made  
in honour of:

Mrs Anita Higginson	Mr Nicholas Wells
Betty Nichols	Mr Paul Henry Beltz
Mrs Beverley Carter	Mr Peter Dunford
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