

research thanks to you



Dr Roy Harden
Jones and his
wife Clodagh



Growing research into dementia

The Old Wall

By Dr Roy Harden Jones

*With my new glasses I can see
What goes on behind the tree.
The tree so great, old and tall
Now completely dwarfs the older wall.
Poor wall, ruined by thick and twisting roots
Reminds me of my inner self
Part ruined by age and self neglect
My mortar gone with some bricks cracked
An others into fragments going or gone.
Both wall and I do need more care
With love and mortar and some support
To maintain our structures sound and strong.
If not we will both be found:
Lying in pieces on the ground.*

Copyright 2007 Dr Roy Harden Jones

Research at the Menzies Research Institute in the area of neuroscience is growing rapidly, more specifically research into Dementia.

Dementia is the term used to describe the symptoms of a group of illnesses that cause a progressive decline in a person's functioning. There are a variety of causes. The most common cause of Dementia is Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's disease is a life-changing condition and the main symptoms are usually loss of memory, confusion, problems with speech and understanding, changes in personality and behaviour and an increased reliance on others.

There is no cure and the causes are poorly understood. It can be difficult to diagnose in its earliest stages, and there are currently no drugs available to effectively treat any of the major causes of ageing-related dementia.

At Menzies, our research in this area is broad, including looking into the causes, prevention and cure of Alzheimer's disease as well as the relief of suffering associated with dementia.

Recently researchers have contributed knowledge about dementia and the impact of the disease on carers and service providers through a research project funded by the J.O. and J.R. Wicking Trust.

Researchers at Menzies worked with staff from UTAS' Schools of Nursing and Midwifery and Information Systems to assess the information available to people involved in the care of people with dementia in Southern Tasmania.

Aspects of the findings were presented at the 2007 Alzheimer's Australia national conference in May. The research demonstrated that family carers value receiving an early diagnosis of Dementia. Furthermore, it highlighted the difficulties many faced in trying to get information about available formal service provision, as well as the importance of ongoing information and support. **continued inside...**

Bruce Taylor is coming home see page 2

Dementia research

...from front page

Chief Investigator and Deputy Director of Menzies, Professor James Vickers says the research also demonstrated information gaps, barriers to information access and duplication of effort in information gathering.

"All of which compromise the ability of service providers to deliver appropriate, informed and responsive care for people with dementia," Professor Vickers said.

"It also impacts on the caregivers' capacity to cope and engage with the 'maze' of service agencies available.

Professor Vickers also added: "The lack of knowledge and understanding about dementia is not a new finding.

"But what our research has shown is the kind of impact this is having on service providers and carers," he said.

As part of Menzies' strategy for growth, two new Senior Research Fellows have been appointed, with both working in the area of Alzheimer's disease research.

Professor David Small and Associate Professor Steve Cheung will commence working with Menzies from 1 January 2008.

Menzies' Director Professor Simon Foote says these two new researchers will compliment Menzies' growing knowledge into Dementia.

"I see neuroscience, particularly our work on the ageing brain, as one of the most important areas of growth at Menzies.

"With Australia's ageing population, in particular Tasmania's, it is crucial for us to work in this area," Professor Foote said.

"The Old Wall" (*front page*) was written by Dr Roy Harden Jones on 5 March earlier this year. Dr Jones suffers from Alzheimer's disease and is cared for by his wife Clodagh.

Clodagh and Roy's path, like many others, has been a difficult one. Clodagh says "It was very rocky at first. You have to find things out the hard way."

But Roy's illness has also brought her joy. Roy has discovered a creative talent which is unleashed through poetry and a diary of his Alzheimer's journey.

"It's so important that people see through the strange behaviour to the human being underneath," Clodagh said.

Building approval

The proposed facade of the new Menzies Research Institute building was a hot topic in late April, following discussions by the Hobart City Council's Development and Environment Committee.

On 23 April Hobart City Council considered the Development Application for the project and it was approved with some conditions. The specific detail of the conditions for the Development Permit is yet to be fully assessed.

However, the decision allows for the building 'footprint', height and shape to remain unchanged but will mean some changes to the facade of the building.

The project manager for the project, Jim Ovens, welcomed the decision.

Mr Ovens told *The Mercury* newspaper: "It was a pretty resounding endorsement. We are pleased with that. We did our best to explain to interested parties ... just how important this colocation project is for Hobart and the University of Tasmania.

"We think the facade is terrific but we understand there are a range of views and we are prepared to work with council to come up with a common position.

"We thought we put together a pretty good proposal, but understand it was too bold for some."

He said part of the challenge for the architects now was to work with the council to produce a good building reflecting the outstanding functions performed inside.

Mr Ovens said the colocation would provide a world-standard biomedical research building, coupled with the university medical school.

He expected the redesign and approval process would not be quick, but it was still proposed it would be completed by mid-2009.

MS researcher returning home

Neurologist and Multiple Sclerosis (MS) researcher, Associate Professor Bruce Taylor is returning to Hobart after working at the Christchurch School of Medicine (New Zealand) for three years.

Associate Professor Taylor graduated in 1986 from the University of Tasmania in Medicine and completed his postgraduate training in general Medicine and Neurology in Hobart, Perth and The Mayo Clinic (USA), and then returning to Hobart as a consultant neurologist at the Royal Hobart Hospital.

After working in Hobart for eight years, Associate Professor Taylor accepted his current position in New Zealand.

Next month on his return to Hobart, Associate Professor Taylor says he plans to concentrate on the development of several new studies of MS epidemiology focusing on persons who have had their first ever MS attack to assess their likelihood of developing definite MS.

"I am also interested in how MS affects persons from different ethnic and environmental backgrounds and will

explore the nature of MS in Vietnam through Menzies' current work in the region.

"Plus, I will also be completing a number of established studies and continuing the well established collaborative MS research partnerships Menzies has with other groups nationally and internationally."

Menzies Research Institute's Director Professor Simon Foote says that the Board and staff at Menzies are very grateful of the support of the MS Society of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government for their support in encouraging Associate Professor Taylor to return to Hobart.

"If it was not for the financial support, as well as commitment towards our MS research from the MS Society of Tasmania and the Department of Health and Human Services, I doubt we would have been able to convince Bruce to return to Hobart," Professor Foote said.

Associate Professor Bruce Taylor will be working from Menzies' Macquarie Street office from 2 July this year.



Archaeological excavations on the building site have uncovered what appears to be a rich merchant's house, courtyards and stables dating back to the early 1820s

Adding more weight to obesity research

In May, Menzies' attracted international media attention through the release of research findings which added more weight to medical research on the nation's obesity problem.

Published on 7 May in Australia's premier journal of medical practice and clinical research, *The Medical Journal of Australia*, the Menzies' research demonstrates that obesity in childhood is strongly predictive of obesity in early adulthood.

The findings show that compared with healthy-weight children, obese boys are at five times the risk of becoming obese young men and obese girls are at nine times the risk of becoming obese young women.

The 20-year follow-up of 4,571 Australian children found that 13 per cent of boys and 12 per cent of girls were obese by the time they reached their 20s and 30s.

Chief Investigator of the research and Deputy Director of Menzies, Associate Professor Alison Venn says whilst obese children were at a much higher risk of being obese in adulthood, most obese young adults in the study were *not* obese as children.

"In fact, the proportion of adult obesity that could be attributed to childhood obesity was only 6.4 per cent in males and 12.6 per cent in females.

"The study confirms that the prevention of overweight and obesity in childhood is an essential public health priority. But, it also demonstrates that we need a strong focus on obesity prevention for adolescents and young adults, as well as for children," Associate Professor Alison Venn said.

The news from Menzies sparked debate in the media, when Greens Senator Bob Brown urged the Federal Government to take action through banning junk food advertising aimed at children.



Associate Professor Alison Venn tracks the progress of the CDAH study around Australia

Associate Professor Venn said: "I support having a strong debate about issues that could lead to cultural change in our food consumption and physical activity."

The key findings come from Australia's most ambitious health and fitness study called the Childhood Determinants of Adult Health (CDAH) study.

The CDAH study involves follow-up of more than 5,000 children from across Australia who in 1985 were part of the Australian Schools Health and Fitness Survey and aims to find out how factors in childhood affect the risk of developing cardiovascular disease and diabetes in later life.

Associate Professor Venn says much of what was known about these conditions was determined through research conducted in adults.

"There is strong evidence to suggest that the early stages of these diseases start to occur in childhood," she said.

Associate Professor Venn says it is rare to get the opportunity to examine such a large group of people 20 years after they were originally tested and it is hoped that Menzies researchers will follow-up these people again in 10 years time.

"The information we collect from the CDAH study will help to develop new early prevention measures for heart disease, diabetes and obesity," she said.

The research study has been predominantly funded by a \$2.3 million grant from the National Health and Medical Research Council. The National Heart Foundation, the Tasmanian Community Fund and Veolia Environmental Services have provided additional funding support.


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AMA select Menzies' researcher as new president

Members of the Australian Medical Association of Tasmania have elected Professor Haydn Walters as the President for 2007/8.

Professor Walters says he is delighted to be elected as the President of AMA Tasmania to represent the medical community.

"The Tasmanian health system is undergoing a huge review in the way it delivers hospital and community health services to all Tasmanians.

"The building of a new hospital in Hobart is a once in a lifetime opportunity. During this important time of change the AMA will be the voice of the patient in ensuring the delivery of quality and sustainable health services," he said.

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More than flowers

Gifts of remembrance have been made in honour of:
Mrs Vonda Hughes
Mr Ron Mee
Mr Robert Burk
Mrs Joan Graney
Mr Rodney Scott
Mr Peter Whelan
Mrs Barbara Keogh
Mr Darrell 'Dasher' Eaton



Winners in love and research

The Respiratory Research Group at the Menzies Research Institute and University's Tasmanian School of Medicine made its mark on the international research scene in April, with a husband and wife team collecting two prestigious research awards.

Professor Haydn Walters was recognised as one of Australia's most eminent researchers in the field of respiratory medicine when he was presented with the Research Medal of the Australia New Zealand Thoracic Society in Auckland at the Society's annual scientific meeting.

The Research Medal is awarded in recognition of outstanding contributions to the advancement of knowledge in respiratory medicine or science carried out primarily in Australia or New Zealand.

Professor Walters says that he was humbled to receive the award, which recognises an individual who has demonstrated sustained excellence in their field of research.

"I am fortunate to be working with a dedicated team of scientists in this field in Tasmania and it is inspiring to be recognised by my peers in this way," Professor Walters said.

Also in April, Professor Walter's wife Dr Julia Walters was awarded a highly competitive fellowship from the Australian Lung Foundation to study a new model of care for people in the community living with chronic lung disease.

The *Australian Lung Foundation/Boehringer Ingelheim Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Research Fellowship* will provide support for Dr Walters' research to evaluate a model of care that aims to improve quality of life for patients while reducing health care costs.

The model encourages patients with chronic lung disease to adopt healthier lifestyles, and promotes self-management and earlier intervention for acute periods of illness. Dr Walters will also evaluate the use of an innovative information



Husband and wife team plus successful researchers Professor Haydn Walters and Dr Julia Walters

technology system designed to assist patients to self-manage their condition.

Dr Walters spent many years in General Practice before starting her research career and undertaking a PhD over the last four years at the University of Tasmania.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a major health issue in Australia today. An estimated half a million Australians are affected resulting in health system costs in Australia of over \$300 million per annum.

Yet another reason not to smoke cigarettes

A team at the Menzies Research Institute is the first to demonstrate the harmful effects of cigarette smoking on knee osteoarthritis (OA), primarily with a person with a family history of knee OA.

It is common knowledge that cigarette smoking is associated with an increased risk of common diseases, such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases, respiratory diseases, stroke, and rheumatoid arthritis, but until now research has suggested that smokers have a lower risk of developing knee OA.

Published in late April in the leading arthritis journal in the world, *Arthritis and Rheumatism*, Menzies research conflicts with previous studies and provides significant evidence that smoking does lead to knee cartilage loss and defect development largely in persons whose family has suffered from knee OA.

Investigators Dr Changhai Ding and Professor Graeme Jones say that the difference between the Menzies' study and previous studies related to smoking and knee OA is the imaging equipment used.

"At Menzies we have conducted one of the largest Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) based studies on knee cartilage health so far, where as previous studies

on the relationship between knee OA and smoking have used x-ray images.

"X-rays can only show the space between the bones and not cartilage directly therefore are not necessarily accurate, but an MRI can directly assess cartilage volume and splits in cartilage," Professor Jones said.

Professor Jones states the message from this research is simple: "If you have a parent who has suffered from knee osteoarthritis you should think twice about continuing or taking up smoking."

Osteoarthritis is a highly prevalent and costly disease, affecting more than

3.4 million Australians. It has been designated a National Health Priority due to its extent and its socioeconomic impacts.

Tasmanian research studies have found a high prevalence of OA and osteoporosis in the Tasmanian community, especially in the older population (more than 30%). Nearly 200 total knee replacements are performed for knee OA in Southern Tasmania every year.

Cost-effective interventions and continued research and development to delay the onset of osteoarthritis offer potential for substantial reductions in the future projected costs and burden of the disease.



Professor Graeme Jones and Dr Changhai Ding analysing an MRI

A partnership for all Tasmanians (RHHRF)

Ten Menzies Research Institute researchers were recipients of Royal Hobart Hospital Research Foundation grants for 2007.

The funding totalling more than \$317,000 highlights the strengthened partnership between the Research Foundation and Menzies.

Research Foundation's Patron, the Governor of Tasmania, presented the grants at a ceremony in Hobart on 26 April this year.

Menzies' Director Professor Simon Foote says the 2007 Grant Round demonstrates the significant support the Research Foundation provides towards funding the early stages of research.

"This year Menzies received the majority of funds distributed by the Research Foundation, with the Executive Director Tony Reidy indicating there is still more funds to come.

"Without this support many of our researchers would not be able to launch projects off the ground in the first place.

"I believe local support from organisations like the Research Foundation is crucial to our future success nationally and internationally."

Professor Foote says he looks forward to the relationship strengthening even more as Menzies and the Research Foundation establish more research fellowships.

"The Research Foundation has recognised the need to fund more general postdoctoral research fellowships in the aim of attracting some of Australia's, or even the world's best up and coming researchers.

"So we are now working to try and establish such programs in the future," Professor Foote says.

Diary Date – 2007 Art of Christmas

The Royal Hobart Hospital Research Foundation is partnering with the Menzies Research Institute for the 2007 Art of Christmas.

The fundraiser is in its third year and promotes Tasmanian art through the sale of Christmas Cards with all proceeds supporting medical research in Tasmania.

Art of Christmas will be launched on the evening of Thursday 27 September this year.

Publications

The following papers from the Menzies Research Institute have been published since the last issue of the Bulletin.

1. Gartlan J, Male S, Donaldson L, *Nelson M, *Winzenberg T. **GP workforce participation in Tasmania.** Australian Family Physician 2007; 36(5):378-84.
2. Panelli R, Moore SJ, Kilpatrick C, Matkovic Z, *D'Souza WJ, O'Brien TJ. **The Liverpool Adverse Events Profile: relationship to AED use and mood.** Epilepsia 2007; 48 (3): 456-463.
3. *D'Souza WJ, O'Brien TJ, Murphy M, Trost NM, Cook MJ. **Tooth-brushing induced epilepsy with structural lesions in the primary somatosensory area.** Neurology 2007; 68 (10):769-71.
4. Gregory J, *Johns DP, Walls J. **Relative vs absolute physiological measures as predictors of mountain bike cross-country race performance.** Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research. 2007, 21(1), 17-22.
5. Matheson MC, Raven J, *Johns DP, Abramson M, *Walters H. **Associations between reduced diffusing capacity and airflow obstruction in community-based subjects.** Respiratory Medicine. 2007. doi:10. 1016/j.rmed.2007.02.000. (E-published ahead of print).
6. *Venn A, *Thomson R, *Schmidt M, *Cleland V, *Curry B, Gennat H, Dwyer T. **Overweight and obesity from childhood to adulthood: a follow-up of participants from the 1985 Australian Schools Health & Fitness Survey.** Med J Aust 2007;186: 458-460.
7. Winzenberg T, Hansen E, Jones G. **How do women change osteoporosis preventive behaviours in their children?** Eur J Clin Nutr 2007 (E-published ahead of print).
8. Minstrell M, *Winzenberg T, Rankin N, Hughes C, Walker J. **Supportive care of rural women with breast cancer: changing needs over time.** Psycho-oncology 2007 (E-published ahead of print).
9. Gartlan J, *Winzenberg T, Male S, Donaldson L, *Nelson M. **A census of GP workforce participation in Tasmania.** Aust Fam Physician 2007;36:378-81.
10. *Ding C, Cicuttini F, *Blizzard L, *Jones G. **Smoking interacts with family history with regard to change in knee cartilage volume and cartilage defect development.** Arthritis & Rheumatism, 2007; 56(5):1521-8.
11. *Ding C, Cicuttini F, *Jones G. **Tibial subchondral bone size and knee cartilage defects: relevance to knee osteoarthritis (review).** Osteoarthritis & Cartilage, 2007;15(5):479-86.
12. *Ding C, Martel-Pelletier J, Pelletier JP, Abram F, Raynauld JP, Cicuttini F, *Jones G. **Knee meniscal extrusion in a largely non-osteoarthritic cohort: Association with a higher loss of cartilage volume.** Arthritis Research & Therapy 2007; 9: R21 (E-published ahead of print).
13. *Ding C, Martel-Pelletier J, Pelletier JP, Abram F, Raynauld JP, Cicuttini F, *Jones G. **Meniscal tear as an osteoarthritis risk factor in a largely non-osteoarthritic cohort: A cross-sectional study.** Journal of Rheumatology, 2007; 34(4):776-84.
14. Mundt DJ, Mundt KA, Luippold RS, *Schmidt MD, Farr C. **Clinical epidemiological study of employees exposed to perfluorononanoic acid (PFNA) blend.** Occupational Environmental Medicine (E-published ahead of print).

*Menzies researchers.

Grants

The following grants have been awarded to the Menzies Research Institute since the last issue of the Bulletin.

The Asthma Foundation of Tasmania Grant - Research. Walters, EH
Tasmanian Asthma Survey (TAS) \$50,000

Multiple Sclerosis Tasmania Agreement-Fellowship Support. Taylor, B
Menzies Research Institute Senior Fellowship Support \$180,000

The Cancer Council Tasmania Grant-Travel Holloway, AF; Oakford, PC
EMBO Conference on Chromatin and Epigenetics attendance \$1,200

Australian Cystic Fibrosis Research Trust Grant. Reid, DW
Improving self-efficacy in adolescents and adults with cystic fibrosis \$59,250

National Heart Foundation Grant-Travel. Schmidt, MD
International Conference on Physical Activity & Obesity in Children, Toronto, ON; Annual Meeting of the Society for Epidemiologic Research, Boston, MA \$1,500

Masonic Centenary Medical Research Blizzard, C
Foundation PhD Scholarship \$60,000

Australian Lung Foundation Boehringer Ingelheim COPD Research Fellowship. Walters, J
Enhancing Self-Efficacy in COPD \$60,000



Former staff member Nicki Stephens (right) chatting with Rosina Gostling at a social function in 2002

An everyday angel

Mrs Rosina Gostling, formerly of Kingston and Huonville, exemplified the commitment of Menzies' everyday angels. She faithfully volunteered at the Menzies Research Institute for over four years and also made monthly donations that supported research at the Menzies. Menzies researchers and staff now pay tribute with their deep gratitude for Rosina's bequest that was received in April.

Rosina volunteered in Menzies' non-Hodgkin's lymphoma study and haemochromatosis register. Former Menzies' staff member, Nicki Stephens worked closely with Rosina.

"Rosina was a gem, she came in regularly for years to set up filing systems and input data. She was so willing to contribute and was supportive and interested in our work."

Rosina had to master new computer skills to work on the study and register," Nicki said.

Originally from Birmingham, England, Rosina travelled extensively with her husband before settling in Tasmania. Rosina died in July last year and left behind family in the United Kingdom and many close friends who remember her with fondness. Rosina's legacy lives in the memory of those of us at Menzies who honour and will continue to recall her energy, dedication and loyalty.


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