

## VicReN Members Research Skills Survey

Welcome to the February's e-bulletin in which we ask you to identify the gaps in your research skills, and consider the areas of the research process you'd like to learn more about. We also begin showcasing our member's research efforts.

If research is a new interest for you, you may not know what you don't know! So to counter this, and for those of you who have some understanding of the research process, we are working on a *VicReN Research Skills Needs* form. Before we disseminate it to all members, we will ensure it is reviewed by our Practice Committee. We will then collate the information on what you feel your gaps are in research, and how best they can be addressed with your learning style in mind.

In the meantime, we ask that you consider what you know of the research process with regard to the following areas:

- The overall research process from developing a question to disseminating results
- How to develop an idea into a research question
- How to find literature and perform a literature review
- How to design a study and consider study methodology
- How to write a research proposal
- Considering funding issues
- Obtaining ethics approval
- How to collect data
- How to analyse and interpret the results
- How to consider the impact of the findings on your practice
- How to report and disseminate your results

*“If you think  
research is  
expensive, try  
disease.”*

*- Mary Lasker in the WHO World  
Report on Knowledge for Better Health*

It's useful to know about the research process particularly if you're intending to develop up an idea into a formal research project. For those of you who are interested in doing this, and want academic support and qualifications, you can enroll in a PHC RED Fellowship. 4 fellows are accepted annually to undertake a research project through the Department of General Practice at the University of Melbourne. The Fellowship provides financial release for fellows to research through the university for one day a week, for a total of 6 weeks per year.

Alternatively, the university provides postgraduate research programs including Masters, PhD and MD opportunities where appropriate for practice nurses and general practitioners. If these programs are something you would like to consider, contact Dr. Meredith Temple-Smith on (03) 8344 3371 or at [m.temple-smith@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:m.temple-smith@unimelb.edu.au) for more information.

For those of you who want to learn more about research by participating in it, some current opportunities for research are listed inside on page 3.

There are wonderful internet resources available to get you started in the basics of research, and credit is due to the Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development Strategy (PHCRIS) for their role in the development and dissemination of research information found at [www.phcris.org.au](http://www.phcris.org.au). In the forthcoming e-bulletins, we will highlight each of the 10 Steps to Engaging in the Research Process. We hope you find the information useful.

We recognize that some of you have also conducted research that you would like to share with fellow members. In this issue we highlight the research of practice nurse Chris Towers on "Secondary school nurses' and their work providing school-based sexual and reproductive health programs in Victorian schools" on page 2. If you would like to share the results of your research, please don't hesitate to forward it to [msoos@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:msoos@unimelb.edu.au)

# VicReN & Other Events

Here's a brief outline of recent and forthcoming VicReN, University of Melbourne and research-related events to which all VicReN members are cordially invited:

## VicReN Events:

- Practice Committee meeting March 11 2008—for more information, see the box on page 2.
- The academic staff have submitted an abstract to the PHCRIS Conference “Health For All?” in Hobart 4-6 June entitled “Building VicReN Beyond the Boundaries.”
- VicReN news: An abstract will be submitted for the WONCA Conference in Melbourne 1-5 October entitled “Building Research Capacity: The Role of the Practice-Based Research Network VicReN.”

## University of Melbourne Events:

- You are invited to meet Dr. Frances Griffiths from the University of Warwick, UK, for her seminar “Understanding the emergent dynamic of living with a chronic illness.” Monday 10 March 12-1pm, Seminar Room, Department of General Practice, the University of Melbourne, 200 Berkeley Street, Carlton 3053.
- You are invited to meet Professor Nick Mays from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, UK, and attend his seminar “Lessons for improving the use of health services research in policy making from an ‘on-call facility’ for rapid international policy analyses and the English Health Reform Evaluation Programme.” Friday 14 March 3-5pm, Physiotherapy Lecture Theatre, 200 Berkeley Street, Carlton 3053.
- You are invited to meet Professor Nick Mays from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, UK, and attend his public lecture “Research ‘for’ policy and research ‘on’ policy: are they divergent or mutually supportive?” Wednesday 19 March 6-7pm Sunderland Lecture Theatre, Ground Floor Medical Building, corner Grattan Street and Royal Parade, Parkville.
- The Centre for Health and Society is celebrating its ten year anniversary. In order to mark this achievement they are hosting a symposium: “Looking Back Looking Forward: Rights, Social Inequalities and Health” on Wednesday 12th of March 1.30-5pm. Speakers include: Warwick Anderson, Professorial Fellow, Department of History & Centre for Values, Ethics and Law in Medicine, University of Sydney, Papaarangi Reid, Tumuaki (Maori Dean) Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Auckland, New Zealand, Peter Skold, Centre for Sami Research & Centre for Population Studies, Umea University, Sweden, Mick Gooda, CEO Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health. The event will be held at: Graduate House, 220 Leicester St, Carlton 3053. RSVP by Monday 3 March by emailing [ngua@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:ngua@unimelb.edu.au)

## Research-Related Events

- International Congress on Chronic Disease Self-Management 26-28 November is being held at the Grand Hyatt, Melbourne. For more information, visit <http://www.crd.unimelb.edu.au/news/archive.html#materials>

## Secondary school nurses’ and their work providing school-based sexual and reproductive health programs in Victorian schools

VicReN member Chris Towers is a women’s and community health nurse in Colac who completed the Master of Nursing in October 2007. Here she reports results from her minor thesis.

Secondary school nurses provide a broad range of school nursing services in public, private and independent schools in all Australian states and territories. However, the role of Victorian Department of Human Service (DHS) secondary school nurses (SSNs) in providing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education and services to students is relatively unclear. Key focus areas developed for SSNs by DHS required SSNs to play a key role in reducing negative outcomes and risk taking behaviours among students. Evidence is emerging that SSNs are developing a key role in school-based SRH programs. Therefore, evidence about SSNs work in sexual health is required.

A cross-sectional survey of DHS secondary school nurses (N=129) was conducted using self-completed anonymous questionnaires. Seventy four SSNs responded, giving a response rate of 57.4%. Over 90% of respondents provided a diverse range of health promoting SRH programs ranging from classroom programs, individual and small group student consultations, and wider school community programs.

Most respondents believed SRH was a major practice area of SSNs. SSN readiness to provide sexual education and student consultations regarding sexual health depended on their qualifications, nursing experience, participation in professional development, networks, and interest in sexual health. Schools, policies, and the Secondary School Nursing Program guidelines also affected their ability to provide SRH education and care to students.

Significantly, SSNs appear to have been overlooked as a key stakeholder in school-based sexual education and care of students. Sexual health is a DHS Victorian health promotion priority area for 2007-2012 and SSNs need to assert their right as a key SRH stakeholder, and participate in key government groups developing strategies and frameworks to guide sexual education and care of young people.

# VicReN Research Update

Here are 3 current opportunities to help some of your patients and for you to get involved in research!

## Exercise and Type 2 Diabetes Study: do you have patients who might benefit?

Researchers at The University of Melbourne are conducting a 4-week exercise training study in patients with type 2 diabetes. Healthy patients with type 2 diabetes aged 35 to 60, who do not currently partake in endurance exercise training, are needed to participate in the study. The studies involve pre-participation screening, cycling exercise on a stationary ergometer, blood tests and muscle and fat sampling by needle biopsy. For further information please contact: Ms. Sophie Yeo, **8344 5851** or on [syeo3@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:syeo3@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au)

## The Bacterial Vaginosis Antibiotic Probiotic Study

Did you know that:

- BV is the commonest cause of abnormal vaginal discharge in women of reproductive age
- however, we still do not understand how or why it occurs, or whether it is even sexually transmitted.
- BV has significant symptoms (malodorous and often profuse vaginal discharge)
- BV has serious sequelae including chorioamnionitis, spontaneous abortion, preterm delivery and low birth weight, post-abortion endometritis, post hysterectomy vaginal-cuff infection and increased susceptibility to HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

BV relapse is common at 12 months (60-70%) using current recommended therapy (seven days metronidazole therapy).

In conjunction with the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre, we are running a randomised controlled trial funded by the NHMRC to test whether adding vaginal clindamycin OR a vaginal probiotic to metronidazole will improve long term cure rates. The rationale for this is based on two main pieces of evidence; firstly single antibiotic treatment does achieve a 30% long term success rate (12 months) and that a broader antibiotic cover may address organisms not covered in mono-therapy (not single dose) for this polymicrobial syndrome. Secondly, the replacement of Lactobacillus species following metronidazole together with local oestrogen supplementation, both of which may aid in the maintenance of normal flora following antibiotic treatment.

If you have any patients with symptomatic BV who might be interested in joining this study, ask them to telephone us on **1800 217 490** 9am to 9pm any day of the week. All recruitment and treatment is done at the MSHC free of charge.

## The PARTY Project

The Primary Care PARTY Project (Prevention, Access & Risk-Taking in Young People) is based at the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne (Chief Investigator: Dr Lena Sanci). The project is an Australian first evaluating the effectiveness of a practice systems approach versus clinician only approach to detecting health risks in young people attending general practice. We are currently inviting general practices, in metropolitan Melbourne, to take part in 2007-08. The practices need to see at least 15 young people (14-24 years old) per week.

Benefits from participation include: free, high quality training in adolescent health for clinicians and staff; 40 Category 1 RACGP QA & CPD points for GPs; a financial contribution to the practice in recognition of the staff time commitment to the project; plus, analysed, pooled feedback from their own young patients. If you are interested in hearing more about this cutting edge project please contact Kitty Novy: Ph: 03 8344 4538 or **Email: [k.novy@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:k.novy@unimelb.edu.au)**

## Forthcoming VicReN Practice Committee Meeting

The next Practice Committee meeting will be held on **Tuesday 11 March 6:30—8:30pm** in the tea room, the Department of General Practice, the University of Melbourne, 200 Berkeley Street, Carlton 3053.

The guest speaker will be Dr. Douglas Boyle, Senior Research Fellow in Informatics at the University of Melbourne School of Rural Health, Shepparton. He will talk about his work with the CONDUIT project, linking computer software as well as data collection, utilization and management.

For those who recently indicated interest in becoming a Practice Committee member, please await further notification of your attendance requirements after this first meeting in March is held.

# 7 Questions for Dr. Chris Hogan

Chris Hogan, VicReN Foundation Member, is well-known in general practice not only for his commitment to it but also for his drive, enigmatic character and desire to make a difference.

Dr. Hogan is a GP principal at a Sunbury general practice with 8 GPs and 26 supporting personnel. Additionally, he serves as chairman of the Central Highlands General Practice Network and the Ministerial Working Party for Department of Human Services, Victoria, is a member of the GP Asthma Group for the National Asthma Council, serves on the Member Services Committee for Asthma Australia, is a GP representative on pharmaceutical industry advisory boards, and is RACGP representative for the Anti-Cancer Council of Australia and the Australian Resuscitation Council. Dr. Hogan is a reviewer for the Medical Journal of Australia and has an impressive publications record.

*“Research is organized curiosity. It provides the evidence that underpins what we do.”*

We are excited that Dr. Hogan also contributes his time and energy to VicReN after helping to found it.

## 1) How long have you been a GP for?

Since 1978.

## 2) What are the highlights of your job?

Being able to make a difference. Being able to help people live their lives a little better, by teaching students, HMOs and registrars, by lecturing colleagues and the community on a range of subjects, by contributing to research and by involvement with a variety of state and federal organizations.

## 3) What role do you see research taking in general practice?

GPs see almost the whole community but the wealth of knowledge and wisdom in general practice has never been captured. Research can tell us not only about the health of the whole community but can also define, delineate and display the skills of GPs.

## 4) What role do you see for a PBRN such as VicReN in general practice?

To support and expand the skills of general practice teams in data collection and utilisation, to improve our ability to use our limited resources effectively, to contribute to the general body of medical knowledge, to give GPs a forum to discuss and disseminate their findings, to put some of the fun back into general practice and to use the knowledge and evidence collected to drive political change in the delivery of medical care to Australians.



Dr. Chris Hogan with some team members at Family Medical Centre, Sunbury

## 5) Why are you interested in participating in VicReN?

To put some of the fun and wonder back into general practice.

## 6) What would you like VicReN to offer you?

A forum to discuss and disseminate the findings of colleagues, to support GPs and to involve various university departments.

## 7) How could VicReN help you achieve this?

By helping to train my staff in data collection and utilisation.

Dr. Hogan is one of 5 VicReN Foundation Members. Meet each Foundation Member in forthcoming newsletters!

## VicReN Membership Update

To date, VicReN comprises of:

- ❖ 4 University of Melbourne academic staff
- ❖ 10 Practice Nurses
- ❖ 1 Divisions of General Practice member.
- ❖ 26 General Practitioners
- ❖ 1 Practice Manager

## General practitioners, practice nurses and managers: are you interested in joining VicReN?

If you would like to learn more about how VicReN can build your research skills capacity, add a new dimension to your day-to-day routine, or link you with other primary care clinicians with a genuine research interest, or if you know of fellow clinicians who are, don't hesitate to contact Melinda Soós for more information on (03) 8344 3392 or via [msoos@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:msoos@unimelb.edu.au)