

Welcome to the latest VicReN e-bulletin in which we invite you to attend our first breakfast meeting about data coding and sharing, offer PHCRED Fellowships in primary care research for 2009 and introduce VicReN Committee Member Dr Christine Longman.

Can we improve clinical care by sharing our data?

We invite you to attend the first of a series of VicReN breakfast meetings. Providing talks and interactive sessions across a range of issues important to primary health care, this series provides opportunities to learn, to contribute and to meet other members. This event is presented by Dr Marie Pirotta, who will discuss the role of sharing data in improving clinical care and share her recent experiences of visiting the Nijmegen practice-based research network in the Netherlands.

Coding data means to label the observations and measurements clinicians make in a consultation using standard recognizable computer-based codes. If all clinicians in all practices were to use the same codes, it would enable them to share what they do and compare their work with that of others.

The breakfast meeting will cover the following questions:

- **Why is accurate coding of clinical data important?**
- **What can we learn from the experiences of other practice-based research networks internationally?**
- **What potential does VicReN have to contribute to better patient care?**

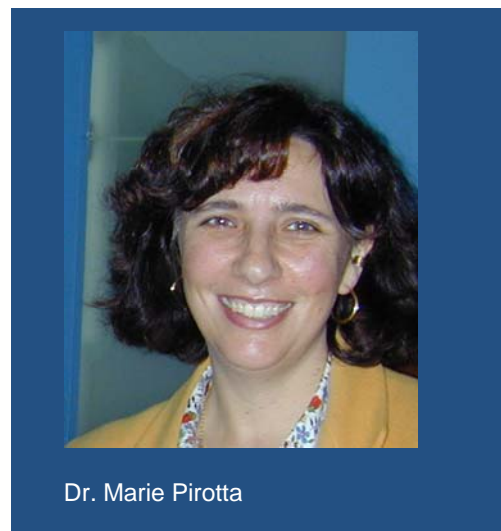
Dr Marie Pirotta is an academic GP in Clifton Hill who has a wide variety of research interests including complementary medicine and women's health. She is VicReN Committee Chair and also chairs the Human Ethics Administrators Group in the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne.

When: Thursday, 9 October 2008 7:30—8:30am

Where: Seminar Room, Ground Floor, Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne, 200 Berkeley Street, Carlton.

A breakfast of coffee, croissants and fresh fruit will be provided.

RSVP is essential for catering purposes: contact Melinda Soós via msoos@unimelb.edu.au or (03) 8344 3392.



Outcomes of the 9 September VicReN Committee Meeting

The Committee attended the third meeting of this year and discussed the following:

- To acknowledge the volunteer commitment of the VicReN Committee members, eligible members were presented with an application to become Honorary Clinical Members of the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne.
- Following up on the suggestions of the last meeting, the VicReN Coordinator is working to develop a web group on the VicReN website to enable members to list their current research involvement and interest, comment on and make suggestions to the VicReN e-bulletins and PCRU News and to post results of the baseline pilot survey and VicReN research outcomes.
- The VicReN Coordinator reported the network now has 87 members and outlined outcomes from VicReN-related research as well as from the HopSCOTCH forum, a knowledge-exchange event between research project staff and VicReN GPs.
- The main business concerned a data-sharing project between Committee member practices (possibly to be opened to the wider network practices) - the possibility of linking computer systems and potential projects of interest were explored.

Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development Fellowships



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

PHCRED Fellowships 2009—Applications are now open!

Now is the time to consider enrolling for these highly sought-after and valuable fellowships

The Victorian Primary Health Care Research Evaluation and Development (PHCRED) program is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. Each year, it offers a number of fellowships, scholarships or bursaries to primary health care practitioners. The call has been put out for practitioners, whether general practitioners, practice nurses, practice managers, Divisions of General Practice or other stakeholder staff, to consider applying for the 2009 fellowships.

The University of Melbourne's Department of General Practice, based in Carlton, offers 4 fellowship places. Fellowships enable primary health care practitioners to gain "hands on" experience of the research process by undertaking a research project and attending an Introduction to Research workshop program. Applicants can apply for a fellowship in either of the following categories:

- **Researcher Development Program (RDP)** This fellowship is advertised for those who are novices or who have little research experience to undertake a 9-12 month project for one day a week
- **Masters by Research (HDR)** This fellowship is available for those with appropriate qualifications to enroll and commence a higher degree by research

Fellowships in both categories are for a maximum of 12 months from January—December 2009.

Supervision and mentorship will be provided by experienced primary care researchers with access to infrastructure and specialists. Regular research meetings, workshops and training are part of the program and fellows are expected to attend fortnightly teaching sessions during the day. Fellows can expect to extend and develop their research skills, explore possibilities of higher qualifications and potential career options and primary health care researchers.

Priority Research Areas

- Adolescent health
- Chronic disease (e.g. diabetes)
- Mental health (e.g. abuse, depression)
- Domestic violence
- Sexual health
- Complementary medicine

Applications close 5pm on Monday, 20 October 2008.

For more information about payment, tenure, eligibility and the selection process, please refer to the VicPHCRED website <http://www.vicphcred.monash.edu.au/>

In the Department of General Practice at the University of Melbourne, PHCRED Fellows are managed and largely supervised by Dr Meredith Temple-Smith. The topics of the cohort of 2008's Fellows are varied and explore:

- 1) Acupuncture to treat hot flushes in menopausal women;
- 2) The efficacy of Balint groups in increasing general practitioner empathy and preventing burnout;
- 3) General Practitioner workforce issues as they relate to Aboriginal communities; and
- 4) The sexual health needs of injecting drug users.

Therefore the ability to examine a wide variety of areas under the umbrella of primary health care is possible.

Get in quick—contact **Dr Meredith Temple-Smith** via m.temple-smith@unimelb.edu.au or **(03) 8344 3371** to register your interest or for more information.

Are you interested in tackling childhood overweight? Register your interest now!

VicReN is collaborating with the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and the Royal Children's Hospital in a new shared-care trial to address child obesity through general practice—we'd like your input.



Currently, 200,000 Australian children have established obesity.

Associate Professor Melissa Wake from the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute at the Royal Children's Hospital and Professor Jane Gunn from the Primary Care Research Unit in the Department of General Practice, the University of Melbourne along with other experts in child obesity, are collaborating to trial an innovative shared-care approach to the management of childhood obesity, drawing together four established lines of research:

- 1) Specialist child obesity approaches that are known to be effective
- 2) Positive aspects of our previous child obesity prevention general practice trials
- 3) Computerised support and decision assistance in primary care
- 4) The effectiveness of shared-care approaches. Because all elements are already in place, it has a high degree of feasibility and, therefore, a high chance of success.

VicReN aims to ensure that all projects associated with it are ethical and support general practice. VicReN member Dr Cathy Hutton provides a GP advisor role to this project to ensure its methodology and intervention is appropriate to general practice, feasible and sustainable. The VicReN Coordinator will provide administrative and recruitment support.

Do you have an interest in child obesity? If so, and you would like to learn more about participating in this exciting trial, please contact the VicReN Coordinator via (03) 8344 3392 or via msoos@unimelb.edu.au

Website: http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/research.cfm?doc_id=12126

Email: hop.scotch@mcri.edu.au



VicReN Research Update

Exercise and Type 2 Diabetes Study

Sophie Yeo, a PhD candidate from the Department of Physiology at the University of Melbourne, is conducting research to better understand the molecular bases of type 2 diabetes and the effects of exercise so as to optimise existing, and develop potentially novel, therapeutic strategies that enhance health outcomes in Type 2 Diabetes.

She seeks your assistance in identifying potential participants in our studies – these patients must have been diagnosed with diabetes and are being managed primarily by diet/weight loss, with perhaps oral hypoglycaemic agents, but ideally not with metformin or TZDs. When such patients are identified, she will provide the plain language statement and contact details should they wish to proceed. For further information please contact: **Ms Sophie Yeo, (03) 8344 5851** or syeo3@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au

VicReN Calendar

- All members are welcome to attend the first VicReN breakfast event entitled "Can we improve clinical care by sharing our data?" The event will be held on Thursday, 9 October 7:30—8:30am at the Department of General Practice, 200 Berkeley Street, Carlton. A light breakfast of coffee, croissants and fresh fruit will be provided.
- The abstract "Research Capacity Building: The Role of the Practice-Based Research Network VicReN" has been accepted and will be presented at the WONCA Conference, to be held in Melbourne 3-5 October, by the Coordinator Melinda Soós and will be presented both as a mini-oral presentation and in poster format.
- The abstract "The Role of Practice-Based Research Networks in Solving Real Mental Health Issues" was accepted as a poster presentation at the Australian General Practice Network Conference to be held in Darwin between 29 October—1 November.

The 10 Steps of the Research Process

2. Conduct a review of the literature

In this second part of the 10-part series, we consider the essential elements of reviewing literature: why conducting a review of the literature is important and how it is undertaken. Have you ever wondered how you would review the literature around an area of interest? How do you source the information? How do you critically appraise the literature? Here we discuss these questions, plus more...

Why undertake a literature review?

A literature review is the comprehensive study and interpretation of literature that relates to a particular topic (Aveyard 2007). By undertaking such a review, you aim to find answers to the particular topic or question of interest and to put the topic into context. Literature reviews synthesize the information that is available on that topic, can provide the full picture and reduce the potential for error from relying on one piece of evidence.

The best way to approach a literature review is systematically. That is, to comprehensively identify and track all of the available literature on the topic. There is an incredible amount of literature available so the next task is to work out the best sources of information. This is done by learning to distinguish between the different types of information you read and determine which of it best answers your research question by providing the most robust evidence. This kind of evidence is generally found in empirical research (primary studies) or reviews of empirical research—they are research studies whose methodology conforms to approved scientific rigor. 'Empirical' means that the work is based on experience; that is, in order to collect new data, the research requires observation, experience and experimentation that can be undertaken through observation, questionnaires, interviews, and measurement techniques. Empirical research is structured firstly stating the research question, then the background to the research to state what is and isn't known in the area, an outline of the methods undertaken, the results, a discussion of the results and a conclusion. Empirical research are the most important kind of research because they use a structured approach to address a question. You will also come across non-empirical information including newsletters, discussion papers, opinion pieces and editorials, letters, policy reports, etc. Use of this kind of material can provide greater insight into the topic area, but will need to be rigorously reviewed to validate its appropriateness and methodology (the way research is undertaken).

Sources of literature

Focus on the literature that you will need to answer your question. Consider the inclusion and exclusion criteria that will help refine your search and maintain its relevancy; this could include a date range, research only from particular countries or laboratories etc. Consider also the publication bias that journals will tend to publish the positive effects of an intervention rather than no effect or a negative effect could be determined.

- Empirical research: Systematic reviews, quantitative research and qualitative research
- <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/> - this is a first-line site to source empirical research
- Non-empirical research/grey literature: Newspaper and magazine articles, letters, editorials, government reports, industry reports, policy reports, website information, leaflets
- <http://www.google.com>—this search portal can help you source non-empirical research

Hierarchy of evidence

Having a hierarchy of evidence means that research methodologies are ranked against each other according to the strength of evidence they provide (Aveyard 2007). This means that some kind of methodologies are better than others in answering certain kinds of questions and means the higher up a methodology is ranked, the more robust it is and the stronger the effectiveness of the research treatment or intervention is. The hierarchy is ordered thus: 1) Systematic reviews and meta-analyses; 2) Randomised controlled trials; 3) Cohort and case-controlled studies; 4) Surveys; 5) Case reports; 6) Qualitative studies; 7) Expert opinion and 8) Anecdotal information. More information on each will be provided in forthcoming e-bulletins. This hierarchy is worth keeping in mind when searching for information.

In the next edition of the e-bulletin we will consider tips for writing up your search strategy and how to synthesise your information.

Resources:

- Aveyard, H (2007) *Doing a Literature Review in Health and Social Care: A Practical Guide*. Open University Press, Great Britain.
- Hek G, Judd M and Moule P (2004) *Making Sense of Research: An Introduction for Health and Social Care Practitioners*. SAGE Publications Ltd, Great Britain.
- Sim, J and Wright C (2000) *Research in Health Care: Concepts, Designs and Methods*. Stanley Thornes Ltd, Great Britain.



7 Questions for Dr Christine Longman

Christine Longman, VicReN Committee Member, is an energetic and caring general practitioner who is currently undertaking a Masters of Medicine by research. She has a wealth of experience as a medical educator and interests across a variety of clinical areas.

Dr Longman is the newest member of the VicReN Committee and we are delighted to receive her valuable contributions. She works in a Yarraville general practice.

1) For how long have you been a GP?

I have been a GP in the same practice for 25 years and a partner there for 22 years.

2) What are the highlights of your job?

The wide variety of work I have done over the years both in and out of the practice. For example, delivering 300 babies, inevitably in the middle of the night, getting to know families over years and having doctors as patients. Working with people experiencing real battles in their life and admiring their courage (e.g. pregnant women who are drug dependent) is also another highlight. I enjoy being a medical educator, which I have done for 22 years; this involves working closely with doctors who are just starting out in general practice. I have been involved in various rewarding GP activities over the years and have met lots of other GPs e.g. through managing the local division Drug and Alcohol Program for 3 years.

3) What are you currently studying and how is it important to primary health care?

I am completing the Masters of Medicine by research. My current working title is: "Influences on Opioid Pharmacotherapy Prescribing In General Practice in Victoria." I am at the stage of analyzing the data. Undertaking this study has been one of my best professional decisions I have made and has brought all sorts of side benefits.

4) and 5) What role do you see for a PBRN such as VicReN in general practice?

Until recently, I never really thought too much about how everything we do is based on previous research (or that it should be). Being involved in VicReN has made me think much more carefully about decisions I make every day in practice and the evidence, if any, they are based on.

The two roles I would see are:

1) Our practice (and others) have a huge data base of patient information which is ready-made for research projects. VicReN could facilitate the use of that data by working with practices to set up projects.

2) Also, VicReN could assist GPs to get involved in small and large research projects by supporting and helping to design, plan and set up the projects. For example, if a GP had a small research project in mind, he/she could contact VicReN who could advise on all aspects of completing such a research project. VicReN could also liaise between practices so that several GPs from different practices could work on the same project.

6) Why are you interested in participating in VicReN? 7) What would you like VicReN to offer you?

I enjoy getting involved in any projects that help contribute to quality general practice. I have always enjoyed meeting other GPs and I have a committed involvement in human rights.

My main interests are bushwalking, and drinking coffee in local cafés.

Dr Longman is one of nine VicReN Committee Members. Meet each Committee Member in forthcoming newsletters!

"Being involved in VicReN has made me think much more carefully about decisions I make every day in practice and the evidence, if any, they are based on."



Dr. Christine Longman

General practitioners, practice nurses and practice 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 practitioners with a genuine research interest, don't hesitate to contact the VicReN Coordinator Melinda Soós for more information on (03) 8344 3392 or via msoos@unimelb.edu.au