Childhood obesity risks can be reversed

Childhood obesity has been an increasing problem worldwide. During the past three decades we have seen an alarming increase in the number of overweight and obese children. There is strong evidence that childhood obesity is associated with increased risk of heart disease and diabetes later in life.

What hasn’t been clear, until now, is whether childhood obesity leads to longer term health problems, even if obesity in adulthood is avoided.

A study, conducted by Menzies Research Institute Tasmania and the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, in collaboration with a number of international institutes, has shown that childhood obesity does not permanently increase cardiovascular risk if obesity in adulthood is avoided.

The study looked at long-term follow-up data of 6,328 participants in three countries. It combined data from four large studies: the Bogalusa Heart Study (US), the Muscatine Study (US), the Childhood Determinants of Adult Health (CDAH) Study (Australia) and the Cardiovascular Risk in Young Finns Study (Finland), with relevant data collected in childhood and adulthood including data on height and weight, and on markers of heart disease and diabetes risk.

Menzies’ Professor Alison Venn, an investigator on the study, says the key finding of the study is that overweight and obese children who avoided obesity as adults, had a similar heart disease and diabetes risk as those who were normal weight children. In other words, there were no lasting harmful effects for these conditions.

“The findings reinforce the concept that it is worthwhile helping overweight children reach a healthy weight as they become adults,” Professor Venn said.

“However, because excess weight is often hard to budge and to keep off, prevention remains better than cure. A healthy diet and physical activity are the keys to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight at all ages.

“We still have much to learn about the best ways to help overweight and obese children achieve a healthy weight. We need to make greater efforts as communities and families to promote physical activity and healthy eating for everyone.

“Parents are important role models for children. Parents can look at ways the whole family can adopt healthier eating habits. Switch off the TV and the computer – be active together,” Professor Venn said.

The study results were published in the international journal, The New England Journal of Medicine.
Dear supporters,

Many of you may already know that I have decided to leave Menzies and take up a new position as the Dean of Medicine at Macquarie University, Sydney, in early 2012. I have greatly valued my time at Menzies, and have especially enjoyed the opportunity to meet personally with many of you over the years.

Over the past six years, Menzies has significantly contributed to improvements in both local and global health through research programs in cancer, cardiovascular disease, dementia, multiple sclerosis, and other common diseases affecting our community. Together, we have worked to develop Menzies to be a nationally recognised Institute and a powerhouse of research.

Professor Alison Venn has agreed to accept the position of Acting Director, while an international search is carried out for a new Director of Menzies, under the leadership of the Menzies Board.

I have no doubt Menzies will continue to thrive and contribute to building a healthier future for all Tasmanians and the wider community thanks to people, like you, who share our desire to find answers.

Warm regards

Professor Simon Foote

New report on economic impact of MS launched

A new report into the economic impact of multiple sclerosis (MS) reveals the heavy costs associated with the condition, and emphasises the need for investment in research, and the need to do everything we can to prevent and cure MS.

The report, Economic Impact of Multiple Sclerosis in 2010, led by chief investigator, Professor Andrew Palmer from Menzies Research Institute Tasmania (Menzies) and commissioned by MS Research Australia (MSRA), details the cost of MS to individuals and the national economy.

This neurological disorder now affects over 21,000 Australians, most commonly young women, and costs an estimated $1.04 billion per year; an increase of $380 million since last evaluated in 2005. Approximately 750 people suffer from MS in Tasmania, with numbers steadily on the rise.

Tasmania-specific figures show related costs are estimated at $48,945 per person, per year. This leads to over $35 million in direct and indirect costs per year for Tasmania.

Loss of productivity resulting from loss of work was the most costly contributor (48 per cent) to the high costs of MS on Tasmania’s economy.

Professor Andrew Palmer says the report highlights important trends that could be addressed. The report looks at prevalence increase, medication and caring costs and, importantly, loss of employment.

“While some aspects of the findings are as expected, they are nonetheless quite alarming.

“For example, medication is a major part of the direct costs however, as the disease increases in severity, these costs are far outweighed by lost productivity.

“This suggests that an approach for the future should be to focus on prevention, the search for a cure and improved treatments through medical research. If these can slow or halt the progression of disability, it offers to alleviate this burden from the perspective of families living with MS, and for the economy as a whole.

“Public policy that supports people to live productive lives in the community is also of paramount importance.”

Tasmania plays a significant role in MS research through the work undertaken by Menzies and through a local community that supports the cause and actively participates in related clinical research trials.

“The dollars spent on preventing MS will pay off in so many ways – for everyone,” Professor Palmer said.

Working to improve lung health

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is mainly caused by cigarette smoking in Australia, but in developing countries cooking with biofuels indoors is the major culprit.

COPD is characterised by limitation of ability to move air into and out of the lungs, resulting in shortness of breath. The underlying pathological process is inflammation in the airway wall, with structural “remodelling” and tissue destruction. There is also a marked increase in lung (airway) cancer in this condition.

Approximately 2.1 million Australians suffer from COPD. In COPD, there can be both airway disease (chronic bronchitis) and destruction of lung tissues necessary to support the physical shape and function of the airways (emphysema).

The underlying mechanism of airway remodelling which make them progressively narrower in COPD, are poorly described or understood.

However, Menzies have described a novel process for airway remodelling in COPD: the changing of airway epithelial cells into migratory and fibrotic characteristics, a process termed epithelial mesenchymal transition (EMT). Importantly, EMT is a process also closely associated with development of malignancy.

A recent Menzies study published in the scientific journal Respiratory Research confirmed that EMT is an active process in smokers, but especially in COPD patients who are still actively smoking. The study examined airway bronchial biopsies from 63 COPD patients for expression of structural changes and various proteins accepted to be associated with “classic” EMT.

Postdoctoral research fellow, Dr Romy Sohal says that the study showed that EMT is likely to be playing a major role in the long term consequences of smoking.

“The study will contribute significantly to understanding the key components of EMT, which may provide novel drug targets for COPD and prevention of lung cancer.

“It may also help us to understand why lung cancer is so common in smokers, but especially so in those with COPD, where we have found EMT to be most marked,” Dr Sohal said.
Taking steps to relieve depression in the workplace

Depression is common in the working population. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007), around six per cent of the Australian workforce reported suffering from lifelong (12-month symptoms) major depression.

Employed individuals experiencing depression can take sick leave or they can continue to work while ill. Continuing to work while ill is referred to as ‘presenteeism’. Absenteeism and presenteeism are common amongst individuals experiencing depression, and are costly to employers. However, the costs of presenteeism and associated lost productive time far exceed those of sickness absence.

A new Menzies study recently published in the Journal of Affective Disorders, has looked at the factors associated with presenteeism behaviour among employed Australian adults with major depression. The aim of the study is to determine which factors may influence an employee’s decision to continue working when experiencing depression.

Researchers examined, from the 2007 Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, data from 320 employed individuals who self-reported suffering from major depression. Factors looked at included socio-demographic, financial, work and health-related factors.

Findings from the study showed employees who were married, owned a home, and did not have any other mental health conditions were more likely to continue working. This highlights the need for employers to help staff in managing their non-work life. The finding that those with fewer mental disorders were less likely to report presenteeism, suggests individuals experiencing depression who continue to work may be milder cases and ideal candidates for workplace programs which offer flexibility in working hours. Such programs, could help employers use their employees remaining work ability while allowing time off for treatment and recovery. Employers attempting to prevent or reduce negative consequences of depression could focus on this approach.

Chief Investigator for the study, PhD student Fiona Cocker, says “it’s a good investment for organisations to look after the mental health of their staff.”

“It identifies more effective ways to manage work attendance behaviour of individuals benefits both the employer and the employee. Employers acquire a more productive employee and employees gain a more supportive work environment and feel they are getting something positive out of their job.”

Further research looking at the relative importance of psychosocial work environment factors and personality factors such as work demands, effort/reward in balance and conscientiousness however is still needed.

Celebrating grant successes

Menzies has experienced another stellar year with successful grant and fellowship applications in October and November. The following grants and fellowships were received:

NHMRC
Dr Lisa Foa, Honorary Fellow, received a Project Grant for $341,175 to fund her research project titled: ‘The role of store-operated calcium entry in neuronal development’, (2012-2014)
Dr Kaylene Young, Research Fellow, received a Project Grant for $488,542 to fund her research project: ‘New projection neurons (nerve cells) are added to the brain throughout life: identifying their source and function’, (2012-2014)
Dr Russell Thomson, Researcher, received a Project Grant for $613,168 to fund his research project: ‘To search for genetic causes of renal disease in the Tiwi Island Aboriginal Population’, (2012-2014)
Dr Kristy Sanderson, Senior Research Fellow, is a chief investigator on a new Project Grant ($551,071) titled: ‘The ADVENT Cohort Study; measuring the impact of negative emotions on function in post-myocardial infarction Patients after 12 and 24 months’ administered through Monash University, Melbourne, (2012-2015)
Dr Tania Winzenberg, Senior Research Fellow, received $391,076 for a Career Development Fellowship for her research project: ‘Prevention of musculoskeletal disorders and cardiovascular disease – improving the evidence base for primary health care’, (2012-2015)
Associate Professor Leigh Blizzard, Principal Research Fellow, received $432,568 for a Career Development Fellowship for his research project: ‘Building research capacity in epidemiological studies of chronic disease and injury’, (2012-2015)
Professor Haydn Walters, Professorial Research Fellow, received $523,725 in funding for a Practitioner Fellowship for his work in respiratory disease, (2012-2016)

Professor Graeme Jones, Professorial Research Fellow, received $311,850 in funding for a Practitioner Fellowship for his work in musculoskeletal disease, (2012-2016)
Dr Costan Magnussen, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, received $294,892 in funding for a Early Career Fellowship for his epidemiological research project: ‘An effective cardiovascular risk stratification system for children’, (2012-2015)
ARC
Associate Professor Changhui Ding, Principal Research Fellow, received a Future Fellowship for $765,216 to fund his research project titled: ‘Translational research in osteoarthritis: from epidemiological studies to clinical interventions’, (2012-2015)
Dr Roger Chung, Senior Research Fellow, received a Discovery Projects Grant for $270,000 to fund research that will investigate some of the brain’s own mechanisms for protecting itself against Alzheimer’s disease. Title: ‘Cellular mechanisms that protect against copper-bound beta-amyloid’, (2012-14)
Dr Brendan McMorran, Senior Research Fellow, was awarded a Discovery Projects Grant for $280,000 to fund research that will study how platelets kill the malaria parasite, by investigating the role of host molecules and their potential as novel antimalarial agents. Project Title: ‘The protective role of platelets during malaria infection’. (2012-2014)
Director of Menzies, Professor Simon Foote, received Linkage Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities Funding for $630,000 to purchase a high-resolution Nuclear Magnetic Resonance spectrometer and liquids separation module, (2012-2013)

University of Tasmania
Dr James Sharman, Senior Research Fellow, received $15,000 for a Research Enhancement grant for ‘A Pilot Study of the Clinical Effects of Lowering the Dosage of Oxytocin During Elective Caesarean Section’, (2012-2014)

Dr Helen Cameron-Tucker, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, received $17,000 in funding for a Research Enhancement Grant: ‘A Multicentre Trial to Compare Telephone Health-Monitoring, Home-Based Walking and Rehabilitation with Rehabilitation only in Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease’, (2011-2012)

National Heart Foundation
Dr James Sharrman, Senior Research Fellow, received a $130,000 grant for his research project: ‘Central blood pressure: Physiology and clinical value during light exercise’, (2012-2013)
Dr Seana Gall, Research Fellow, was awarded a Research Fellowship for her research project titled: ‘Association between depression and cardiometabolic health in young adults’, (2012-2013)

Australian Rotary Health Research Fund
Dr Seana Gall, Research Fellow, received $43,079 in funding for her project titled: ‘Translational research in understanding the key components of EMT, EMT is likely to be playing a major role in the changing of airway in lung (airway) cancer in this condition. The underlying pathological process biofuels indoors is the major culprit. cigarette smoking in Australia, but in the study is to determine which factors may influence an employee’s decision to continue working when experiencing depression.

Dr Costan Magnussen, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, received $294,892 in funding for a Early Career Fellowship for his epidemiological research project: ‘An effective cardiovascular risk stratification system for children’, (2012-2015)
Business in Mind is an innovative new program looking into ways of improving the well-being and mental health of people working in a small to medium workplace setting. Large organisations and public service sectors typically have access to human resource support and employer sponsored psychological services, but smaller organisations and non-government organisations can struggle to find the time and money for similar services.

The Business in Mind DVD and Resource Kit has been created to help address this gap, and shows managers ways of approaching some of the stresses and challenges around running smaller businesses.

The Kit will be distributed nationally free of charge, and its effectiveness will be evaluated by the project team over three years.

To find out more, or to register online, visit www.businessinmind.edu.au, or contact the project team via email at business.in.mind@utas.edu.au or phone (03) 6226 2713. You can also contact the Chief Investigator, Dr Angela Martin, via email, Angela.Martin@utas.edu.au

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 - October 2011:

New individual donors
Ms Joan Balon
E L Barron
Ms Christine Bell
Mrs Lucy Blackwell
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Mr Anthony Burrill
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The Hobart Ionia Club Inc

Menzies healthy community fund
Honours scholarship program
Hobart Cancer Auxiliary Inc
Matterson Consolidated Pty Ltd
Heart Foundation Tasmania

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

Everyday angels
Anonymous (20)
Mr Tim Albion
Mr Bill Avery
Mrs Kathleen Bevis
Mrs Pamela Blunt
Dr David Boardle
Ms Kathleen Brien
Mr Gordon Brown
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Ms Philippa Micklem
Mr Sam Molland
Mr Peter Morgan
Ms Wendy Noye

The Menzies Research Institute Tasmania is deeply indebted to ALL our generous supporters who kindly donated in 2011. A full list of all our supporters for 2011 is available on our website at www.menzies.utas.edu.au/donorlist2011. Thank you.
Prostate Pete raises funds and awareness

Back in 2007 one of the members of the Lions Club of Forth Valley thought prostate cancer awareness levels in the broader community should be higher and that the club ought to do something. He also had an idea – quite an eclectic one at that. His idea was to collect men’s undies with a donation attached to them. The money raised could then be used for prostate cancer research.

The Forth Valley Lions Club discussed the idea amongst members and decided to push the project to a State level and engage as many Lions Clubs as possible. The project was presented to the Lions 2011 District Convention in 2007 and was successfully adopted as a State-wide project for three years, co-ordinated by the Forth Valley Lions Club.

The Forth Valley Club developed a ‘signature character’ known as Prostate Pete. The Club had Prostate Pete suits manufactured and Prostate Pete appeared at shows and functions throughout the State. Also, the Prostate Pete logo and advertising campaign appeared on the rear of one of the Tasmanian Redline Coaches which travels daily from Northwest Tasmania to Hobart.

Many of the Clubs voluntarily took up the project and hundreds of pairs of undies were collected from around Tasmania and sent to the Forth Valley Lions Club. The Club joined all of the undies together and formed a string over one kilometre long! The ‘Undies Line’ was proudly presented at the Forth Valley Lions Country Music Day in January 2011 to great applause.

The three year fundraising project culminated this November at the Lions Club State Convention in Triabunna where Dr Jo Dickinson, from Menzies, gladly received cheques totalling over $17,000. Dr Dickinson’s team is currently studying genetic susceptibility to prostate cancer and this wonderful donation ensures vital aspects of this research can continue.

A great ride for research

It was going to be no small feat for the 63 riders who headed off in the Tasmanian Police Charity Trust Bike Ride on Friday 18 November. A gruelling 420km ride over three days lay ahead of them.

This was the 5th year of the event and, in 2011, the Trust generously chose to support Menzies and our research into childhood diseases.

Dr Brendan McMorrann, a senior research fellow at Menzies, heroically took part in the ride.

“The ride was an epic, and not for the couch potato. Along with 62 other riders, I travelled from Cradle Mountain to Hobart, via Strahan and Tarraleah,” Brendan said.

“For those familiar with the Tasmanian west coast, you’ll know we made our way over some spectacular and rather vertically challenging countryside. But we all completed it; no major accidents or problems, and had plenty of laughs and good times along the way,” he said.

Day one took the group from Cradle to Strahan. It began in warm sunshine, but quickly deteriorated into heavy, cold rain, thunder and a tough day in the saddle.

Day two began from Queenstown with the infamous Queeny Hill and then on up to the central plateau to Derwent Bridge and through to Tarraleah Village. The rain and cloud disappeared, the roads dried out and the scenery was spectacular. Day three saw the riders heading from Tarraleah down the Derwent Valley to Hobart and then finish at the Police Marine Division in North Hobart.

“A fast and mostly dry run, but with some unexpected challenges: dairy cow crossings, a sheep muster and a lethal set of railway lines (ouch!),” Brendan said.

“The ride itself was top class and one I will remember for a long time. Organised by the Police, Richard (Doogs) Douglas headed the team. He put together an event where absolutely everything was taken care of. Prior to the ride, the group did a fantastic job fundraising, with $40,000 banked and on its way to Menzies.

“I feel very privileged to be part of the event. My heartfelt thanks go to Doogs, the support team, and fellow riders for making the trip such a fun and successful event. Thanks also to those who personally supported me in my own fundraising,” he said.

Medical Science 2 well underway

Anyone driving down the Brooker Highway or Bathurst Street in Hobart is likely to notice that the Menzies’ Stage II building works, known as Medical Science 2 (MS2), are well underway. The unique façade of MS2 is going up quickly and looking very impressive.

MS2 is expected to cost an estimated $90 million, and the challenge for Menzies is to raise $5 million from Australian philanthropists, with the State Government promising to match up to another $5 million on a dollar-for-dollar basis, before the building is completed in early 2013.

Stage II will transform the site into a comprehensive medical research precinct with a world-class biomedical and clinical research facility. The six-storey building, with a 250-seat lecture theatre and a basement car park, will enable Menzies to recruit around 100 new researchers and expand student numbers.

The good news is that philanthropist Graeme Wood recently made a $2 million gift towards the Menzies’ capital campaign. We were delighted to have him visit Menzies in October and see first-hand the work that we do.

Graeme Wood said that he was proud to be supporting world-class medical research through the project:

“Stage II of Menzies is important as it will add to the vibrancy of the strong medical and scientific research community that already exists in Tasmania.”

Professor Simon Foote welcomed the announcement of the $2 million donation from Graeme Wood. He was also delighted to receive another generous donation recently, from the Tasmanian-based Select Foundation for $500,000.
Art of Christmas 2011

Menzies celebrated yet another very successful Art of Christmas event at the Long Gallery, Salamanca in October this year. There were over 60 artworks available for purchase and, thanks to the generosity of our numerous sponsors, 31 talented Tasmanian artists, volunteers and over 200 guests who attended, we have raised over $45,000 this year.

We were thrilled to have ABC Hobart radio presenter, Michael Veitch, as host for the evening and our auctioneer Nick Corkhill did a superb job running the live auction. The lovely music of lutenist, Susan King, topped off an evening filled with a friendly atmosphere and a true sense of community support.

Buy your Christmas cards from Menzies

Menzies has great pleasure in presenting the 2011 Christmas card collection. The Art of Christmas range features original artworks, donated by acclaimed Tasmanian artists Junko Go, Mandy Renard, Madeleine Goodwolf, Michael Weltnauer, Cathy McAuliffe, Stuart Clues, Tom Samek, Bert Aperlico, Simone Pfister and Louise Bloomfield.

There are 11 unique Tasmanian designs to choose from, plus a variety pack.

Price: $10 per pack of 12 cards. Proceeds from the sale of these cards will directly support medical research in Tasmania.

To purchase your cards by phone contact Kathryn on (03) 6226 7700, or buy them in person at Fullers Bookshop, Handmark Gallery or Menzies’ main reception.

A small group making a big difference

The Hobart Cancer Auxiliary Inc (HCAI) became a reality after a public meeting was held at the Hobart Town Hall 27 years ago. The HCAI Committee held its first meeting on 4 November 1987 and they have been successfully fundraising ever since.

The HCAI over the years has provided equipment for patient treatment and support, staff support including attendance at conferences, provision of information relating to cancer (treatment and facilities available) and generally benefitting the lives of cancer sufferers and their families during their treatment and ongoing care.

Earlier this year one member thought it would be a good idea for the HCAI to expand its role into the area of cancer research, a suggestion that was enthusiastically embraced by the Committee. The Committee then further decided it was very keen to support a young Tasmanian involved in cancer research.

Menzies has for some years offered a number of scholarships to young researchers to help support them through their challenging Honours or PhD years. HCAI very generously decided to support this scholarship program for 2012 with a donation of $5,000.

With a current membership of ten active members and six associate members, HCAI is a small caring group making a big difference. Menzies is phenomenally grateful that HCAI has chosen to support medical research in Tasmania and looks forward to sharing the successes that this kind of generous financial support provides.
More than Flowers

In Memoriam
August 2011 – October 2011
We gratefully acknowledge gifts made in honour of:

Anonymous (1)  Mrs Joy Harris
Mrs Rena Adams  Mr Gregory R Jarvis
Mrs Margaret Armstrong  Mrs Laura Mason
Mr Steven L Barrett  Dr Fergus Mitchell AM
Mr Les Beaumont  Mrs Shirley Mooney
Mr Frank Brooking  Mr Thomas H Plummer
Mrs Judith Burrill  Ms Mary Ellen Scott
Mr Maxwell Darcey  Mr John Sluce
Mrs Dolores Davis  Mr Frank Stary
Mr Leslie Devine  Mrs Beryl Woods

Society for the Future

“One sentence in your Will can fund life-saving medical research
Remember Menzies Research Institute Tasmania in your Will”

If you would like more information please contact Sam East on 03 6226 7782

Bequests save lives by funding research.

Thank you!

Yes, I would like to help the Menzies Research Institute Tasmania.

☐ I would like to make a one-off donation of $__________
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Thank you for your support.

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