



Strength from within guides Menzies' bright future

Professor Alison Venn, an internationally renowned population health expert with broad experience in chronic disease, will take over the reins from Professor Tom Marwick and begin as the Menzies Director in the New Year.

Professor Venn is well-known to many Tasmanians through the partnerships and collaborations she has forged with the community, government and clinicians, as well as through her national and international standing as an epidemiologist.

Professor Venn said she was delighted to be offered the opportunity to build on the solid foundations laid at Menzies over the past 27 years.

"At Menzies we place great value in our relationship with the Tasmanian community. To have the opportunity to oversee the continuation and growth of this relationship is very exciting," she said.

"I look forward to continuing to build important partnerships for the Institute across the research sector, with Government and with the community. I will be actively encouraging the translation of research into evidence-based healthcare and policy."

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Tasmania, Professor Peter Rathjen, said the selection committee for the position included members of the world's most distinguished scientific

societies, heads of leading national medical research institutes, external members of the Menzies board and senior health system administrators.

The Chair of the Menzies Board, Mr Bruce Neill, said Professor Venn has an outstanding research record, demonstrated leadership capacity and proven ability to build relationships across research teams, with government and the community.

"This appointment of Professor Venn, who was a Deputy Director of Menzies, recognises the depth of our talent and the capacity of the scientists within our ranks," Mr Neill said.

Professor Venn is a leading epidemiologist but began her career as a biomedical scientist specialising in immunology and biochemistry. As well as being a Deputy Director of Menzies she has been Acting Director on two previous occasions.

Menzies farewells Professor Marwick, who has been appointed Director of the internationally-renowned Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute.

Director's farewell message – inside

Cards for a cause

It's not too late to buy a pack of Menzies Christmas cards. These have been created in beautiful original designs and donated by these talented Tasmanian artists:

Bert Aperloo, Lorraine Biggs, Barbara Cauvin, Sara Ferrington, Nathan Grey, Richard Klekociuk, Eloise Lark, Carol Maney, Cathy McAuliffe, Kate Piekutowski, Michael Weitnauer and Tilley Wood.

A pack of 12 cards costs \$10 and we are proud to say that every cent goes to medical research at Menzies.

We've enclosed an order form, but you can also order online through www.menzies.utas.edu.au/christmascards or by visiting Menzies reception, 17 Liverpool St, Hobart.



Director's message



Professor Tom Marwick.

Welcome to the 2015 Menzies Summer Bulletin

This will be my final message for the *Menzies Bulletin* before I leave to take up a new position as Director of the Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute. I will take many great memories and experiences from my time in Tasmania, but one of the most rewarding has been to be part of the relationship that Menzies enjoys with its supporters. In my working life I have not seen any other medical institute that is so closely aligned with its community, and the value of this relationship in terms the impetus it gives our research is huge.

Each time we produce a *Bulletin* we have the chance to look back over numerous examples of support from community groups and individuals. In recent months we have become the "Charity of Choice" for Run the Bridge Hobart, been the beneficiary of great generosity from the family of Assistant Commissioner Donna Adams and the Police Charity Trust, have received wonderful support for our prostate cancer research from the Hobart Cancer

Auxiliary and have received numerous donations from service clubs. In addition to these donations, the support shown every day by individual donors and volunteers is vital to us.

My research projects based in Tasmania will continue here so I intend to remain a familiar face around Menzies. I offer my warmest congratulations to my colleague and successor, Professor Alison Venn, and assure you that Menzies remains in very safe hands.

It has been a pleasure to work with the Menzies community and I take this opportunity to wish you and the Institute all the best for the Christmas season, and much success for the future.

Regards,

Professor Tom Marwick
Director

Suffering from asthma or hayfever? There's an app for that

Thousands of Tasmanians who suffer from conditions such as asthma and hay fever will be helped to breathe a little easier by a new smartphone app that has been developed with expertise from Menzies.

The app was developed by Tasmanian researchers led by Menzies environmental epidemiologist Dr Fay Johnston.

The AirRater app will alert vulnerable Tasmanians when they are at risk from air-borne pollutants such as pollen and smoke. At the same time it will collect valuable information from allergy and asthma sufferers across the state.

"The AirRater app will provide personal feedback on what it is that particularly sets off users' asthma or hay fever, whether that be smoke, grass pollen or cold weather," Dr Johnston said.

"This will help Tasmanians to better understand and manage their triggers." Asthma affects almost 12% of Tasmanians.

The app was launched by the President of the Senate, Senator Stephen Parry, and Tasmanian Health Minister Michael Ferguson.

The AirRater app combines data from new air-quality sensors installed across Tasmania with real-time weather data and forecasts to give users information about the current levels of potential triggers in their immediate area.



Dr Fay Johnston with app developer Chris Lucani at the launch of the AirRater app. *Photo by Peter Mathew.*

Over time, AirRater will provide individualised reports showing each user how environmental conditions impacted on their symptoms and alerting them when those conditions exist or are forecast.

The AirRater project is funded by the Australian Government, with in-kind contributions from the University of Tasmania and its research partners.

The AirRater project team includes leading environmental health researchers and experts from Menzies, University of Tasmania School of Biological Sciences, the Tasmanian Environmental Protection Agency, CSIRO, the Australian National University and the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services.

The AirRater app can be downloaded from the **Apple App Store** and **Google Play** for Android devices.

Goodbye after three decades of service

Here's a shout out to all the clubs and not-for-profit organisations who regularly make donations to Menzies.

In this *Bulletin* it's fitting to make special mention of the Hobart Cancer Auxiliary, which is winding up after 31 years. One part of the Auxiliary's many valuable contributions over this time has been its support of our young researchers undertaking Honours or PhD studies at Menzies. The Auxiliary's final lasting gift to Menzies is a \$7,500 donation to prostate cancer research, which has been undertaken at Menzies for more than 15 years. The knowledge gained from our prostate cancer research may be used to help improve diagnosis and/or treatment options for men suffering from this cancer.

So long HCA, and thank you for your support of our students.



Our Tall Poppy Award winner

Menzies neuroscientist Dr Kaylene Young is one of three University of Tasmania Young Tall Poppy Science Award winners.

Dr Young's expertise is in the potential for stem cells in the brain to repair brain injuries and even treat diseases such as multiple sclerosis and Alzheimer's. She and her colleagues have found neural stem cells and related progenitor cells, which feed, protect and assist nerve cells, in the outer part of the brain. This area, known as the cortex, is the most prone to damage. By understanding the behaviour and function of these cells, Dr Young and her colleagues hope one day to see them used for treating nervous and brain disorders or damage.

In 2014 Dr Young won the Metcalf Prize, a prestigious national award from the National Stem Cell Foundation of Australia that recognises leadership in stem cell research.

Winners of Young Tall Poppy Science Awards promote study and careers in science among school students and teachers, as well as fostering an understanding and appreciation of science in the broader community.

Menzies part of Launceston super-clinic

Menzies specialists and equipment were part of the team behind a "Saturday super-clinic" at the Launceston General Hospital on August 8. More than 100 new waiting list patients were assessed at the clinic.

Cardiologists from the Launceston General and Royal Hobart hospitals and Menzies joined a team of nurses, technicians, administrative staff and volunteers for the clinic. The Heart Foundation also contributed.

Cardio-Metabolic Health and Diseases is one of the five Menzies research themes, and within this cardiac imaging is a particular specialty.

Applause for stroke researcher

Physiotherapist and researcher Dr Michele Callisaya has been recognised by the Stroke Society of Australasia (SSA), winning the top Investigator Award at the SSA Scientific Meeting in Melbourne.

Dr Callisaya's oral presentation, 'Subcortical infarcts and the risk of falls: combined results of TASCOC and Sydney MAS' earned her the prestigious Peter Bladin New Investigator Award.

"We aimed to examine whether tiny strokes occurring deep in the brain, known as small subcortical infarcts, increase the risk of falls in older people," Dr Callisaya said.

"Our investigation found there is almost double the risk of falls in older people who have three or more small subcortical infarcts.

"Apart from trying to prevent such infarcts from occurring, interventions aimed at strengthening leg muscles and improving vision may offset the risk of falling in older people."

Dr Callisaya's award, \$1,000 and a trip to a Barcelona conference to present her research, provides her with an exciting opportunity to share her work and meet others in the field.

Another winner...

Congratulations to Dr Quan Huynh, who works in the Menzies Cardio-Metabolic Health and Diseases research theme, on receiving the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand's Allied Health and Technology Affiliate Prize.

Post box or in-box?

Would you prefer to receive our publications and invitations by email? If so, simply let us know by sending an email to enquiries@menzies.utas.edu.au. Alternatively, to update postal details please tick the box on the tear-off slip attached to the *Bulletin* and return it to us in the Reply Paid envelope.

Giving a little back to you

On October 5 we held our annual morning tea to say thank you to our volunteers and donors who provide vital support for our research.

We are very grateful to have been able to hold our event once again at beautiful Government House, with the Lieutenant Governor, His Excellency the Honourable Chief Justice Alan Blow and Mrs Blow, hosting the event.

Menzies has almost 80 volunteers all of whom provide invaluable assistance to the Institute by taking on a tasks ranging from helping study participants feel welcome and comfortable in the clinic to filling envelopes for our mail-outs and ably assisting at our events. This contribution allows Menzies staff, in both the research and professional areas, to focus on other priorities for the Institute.

With regard to our financial supporters, for 2015 we have 16 Honours students and 14 PhD students on scholarships, and support for five more scholarships has been provided for 2016. We now have almost 90 Everyday Angels, who pledge a monthly deduction from their bank account. We also have almost 100 supporters who have made a bequest in their Will to Menzies,



Thank You Day at Government House... Menzies would like to thank all volunteers and supporters.

and a further 100 who are known to be currently considering this. Then there are the hundreds of individuals who donate through our appeals.

Donations so far in 2015 are over \$1.2 million, with every cent supporting research. This is incredibly important income to Menzies because competition for research grants has never been tougher. In 2014, across Australia, about 14% of applications for government-funded research grants were successful, and the figure is unlikely to be any higher in 2015.

The purpose of our morning tea was to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to all of our volunteers and regular supporters. Without you Menzies would not be the successful organisation it is today.

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 since our last Bulletin.

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

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Researcher profile: Dr Liesel FitzGerald



You have recently returned to Menzies... where have you come back from?

After completing my PhD at Menzies in 2007, I spent four years in Seattle at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, a year in Edinburgh working on publications and grant applications, and then two-and-a-half years in Melbourne at the Cancer Council Victoria. Initially we were only supposed to be overseas for two

years, but I was obviously side-tracked! I was fortunate enough to be awarded a University of Tasmania "Open to Talent" five-year fellowship and we jumped at the chance to return home.

What is the current focus of your research?

The aim of my research is to identify genetic mutations that cause both familial and sporadic prostate cancer, with a particular interest in early onset and aggressive disease. While many men are diagnosed with prostate cancer, only a third of patients go on to develop an aggressive form and it is quite hard to identify these men when they are first diagnosed. As well as discovering what causes prostate cancer, identifying genetic markers that can allow us to distinguish those men at risk of aggressive disease would allow us to target these men with immediate, live-saving treatments, whilst sparing from unnecessary treatment those men whose disease will remain localised.

What are some of the recent findings from your work?

While I can't give away too much, our Menzies group has very recently made some exciting discoveries through next-generation sequencing of one of our large Tasmanian prostate cancer families. We identified some novel mutations as well as a prostate cancer mutation that was recently discovered in America and

now hope to determine how prevalent these novel and known mutations are in the rest of our prostate cancer families.

What are the biggest challenges in your area of research?

Money and samples! I think every scientist will agree that the funding environment right now is very tough. This unfortunately is a world-wide phenomenon. Another major challenge is recruiting participants into studies. This was especially hard when I was working in the US, where participation rates were very poor. In Tasmania our participation rates are incredible.

What is the most interesting aspect of your work?

My work is constantly changing. There have been major advances in genetic technologies over the last decade and this has brought about great leaps in scientific knowledge. We can now investigate the whole genome for genetic changes, epigenetic changes and gene expression changes in the space of a few days, where once this would have taken us months, if not years! However, with this technology comes the challenge of trying to analyse vast amounts of data. Other exciting aspects of my work are the people I meet and the places I visit. Through the international prostate cancer groups I am a member of, I have been lucky enough to meet some world-famous prostate cancer researchers in cities such as Paris, Vancouver, London and Washington DC. It's so incredible to be able to apply the knowledge I've gained from these interactions to our Tasmanian prostate cancer studies.

If you missed our annual debate this year – that all men aged 50-69 years should have annual prostate cancer screening with a PSA test – you can see it online on our YouTube channel. go to the www.menzies.utas.edu.au home page and click the YouTube icon in the top right-hand corner.



The force is with us

When Assistant Commissioner Donna Adams of the Tasmania Police was named as the Telstra Tasmanian Business Woman of the Year in 2014, no-one would have guessed that the benefits of the award would flow through to medical research at Menzies.

But due to a wonderful act of generosity, Assistant Commissioner Adams' prize money from that award makes up almost half of a \$10,000 donation to Menzies from the Tasmania Police Charity Trust. The money donated will assist in Menzies' breast cancer research.

Ms Adams has a special interest in breast cancer research after her mother died from the disease last year.

The donation will fund an Honours research student for one year to work specifically on secondary breast cancer research as well as providing vital funds for this important research.

In receiving the donation, Associate Professor Jo Dickinson, who leads the Cancer, Genetics and Immunology research at Menzies,



Assistant Commissioner Adams at Menzies with her father, David Adams, and Associate Professor Jo Dickinson.

said that secondary cancers arising from the spread of primary tumours were frequently very difficult to treat effectively.

"This generous donation will contribute to our research aiming to understand the changes that occur in breast cancer cells that allow them to spread to form secondary tumours, and why they then become resistant to treatment. It will also provide an important training opportunity for our students."

We're off and running the bridge... and you can too

Menzies is the Charity of Choice for the 2016 B&E Hobart Run The Bridge and we would love to have you on our team.

By joining our team and making a donation you are supporting research that will create happier and healthier lives for Tasmanians, Australians and people around the world.

Menzies researcher Dr Kylie Smith is an enthusiastic runner and is encouraging as many people as possible to become involved. She says that training for a fun run with friends, family and workmates is a great way to increase your physical activity.

"Having someone to train with can help keep you motivated and it is great to have someone to share the excitement with on race day. By signing up for Run the Bridge, you will not only improve your own health and fitness but also support Menzies to continue important medical research to improve the health of Tasmanians," Dr Smith said.

"There are so many benefits to physical activity – it not only reduces the risk of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers, it can also help prevent or treat mild depression."

Dr Smith is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Menzies and Chair of the University of Tasmania's Healthy@MSP Committee. Her research looks at nutrition, heart disease and diabetes.

There are not many rules for the 2016 Hobart Run the Bridge (for example you don't have to run – walking is fine – and you get to choose from 1km, 5km or 10km), but the one thing you do have to do is register. So get in early, and while you are at it, why not consider boosting the feel-good factor even more by making a donation to medical research at Menzies?



Dr Smith (second from left) with House Rules contestant Matt Smith, distance athlete Hanny Allston and race director Richard Welsh at the 2016 Hobart Run the Bridge launch.

If you would like to join us and raise money for Menzies research as part of your participation in this fantastic event, simply go to www.gofundraise.com.au/beneficiary/Menzies to make your donation and to www.hobartrunthebridge.com.au to register for the event and join our team.

B&E Hobart Run the Bridge is looking for volunteers to help out on the day. If you are interested in supporting the race in this way please call the Menzies volunteer coordinator on 03 6226 4688.

Do you have a relative with heart disease?

Menzies is recruiting participants for a study into reducing the risk of coronary artery disease in families.

You might qualify for this study if:

- You are between 40 and 70 years of age
- Have a family member (parent, grandparent, sibling, aunt, uncle) who has had a heart attack, stent or heart surgery before the age of 60; and
- You are not currently taking a statin drug.

If you think you may be eligible for this study and would like to participate, email Menzies.CAUGHT@utas.edu.au or call Kristyn Whitmore on 03 6226 4235 and leave your contact details.

Are you a breastfeeding mum?

Menzies is continuing to recruit breastfeeding women for the TWINK (Tasmanian Women Iodine Nutrition Knowledge) Study.

If you are currently exclusively breastfeeding your baby (who is six months of age or less) we'd love you to be part of our research. Participation requires one appointment for ½ hour and involves:

- completing a questionnaire
- providing a urine sample
- providing a breast milk sample (optional)

For more information phone Therese on 6226 4706 or email therese.koning@utas.edu.au www.menzies.utas.edu.au/TWINK_Study

More than Flowers



One sentence in your Will can fund life-saving medical research.

Remember the Menzies Institute for Medical Research in your Will.

If you would like more information please contact the Institute Advancement Manager on 03 6226 4236.

Bequests save lives by funding research. **THANK YOU**

In Memoriam July 2015-October 2015

We gratefully acknowledge gifts made in honour of:

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