Dean’s Report

This is the first quarterly newsletter for the Gippsland Medical School (GMS) for 2009. The newsletter will present an eclectic series of articles and information on the various activities of the School. In this issue we feature a brief account of our inaugural medical education symposium and a profile of Dr. Matthew McGrail, one of our younger researchers.

The Gippsland Medical School started in July 2006 and took its first intake of medical students in January 2008.

We are now well into the second year of our full operation with about 57 Year B students and 74 Year A students.

The new facilities that we created on the Gippsland campus at Churchill have been tried and tested and we are fine tuning their operation to get the best use out of them.

Our Year A and Year B students have just enjoyed the first GMS “Back to Base” days, where the two groups were able to work together and share and compare experiences.

The School is currently engaged in preparing the 2009 submission to the Australian Medical Council, in readiness for their visit to us in August this year. The School has also been very aware of the February bush fires that came extremely close to the campus and directly affected the properties of several staff and students, although thankfully no one was injured and no houses were lost.

We are now getting ready for the May Information day for the prospective students of the 2010 intake. We expect increased interest in our course over and above previous years and look forward to the challenges that will be presented to us in the selection of the third cohort of MBBS students for the Gippsland Medical School.

Chris Browne
Head, Gippsland Medical School
April 2009

Dates to Remember

- Gippsland Medical School Information Day
  23rd May 2009

- Monash Gippsland Open Day
  1st August 2009

- Gippsland Medical School Australian Medical Council site visit
  17th – 21st August 2009

- Medical Education Conference
  Wentworth Hotel, Sydney
  30th – 31st October 2009
The Symposium was organised by Associate Professor Robyn Hill and was the first of what is planned to be an annual event initiated by the Gippsland Medical School.

This two day event was well attended by community members, health professionals and health educators and was particularly important at this time as all educators in healthcare are focussing on expanding from more traditional sites of clinical education into community locations. The focus of the Symposium was to provide a forum for participants to share their ideas and expertise in community based education in medicine. The event also allowed for identification of opportunities for broadening the scope of community involvement in medical education.”

Keynote speakers include Professor Paul Worley, Dean School of Medicine, Flinders University and Professor Liz Farmer, Dean Graduate School of Medicine, University of Wollongong. To ensure the Symposium incorporated a wide range of views to stimulate discussion there were some 50 representatives from across Australia and from a number of different organisations, including representatives from Monash University and other leading Australian universities delivering presentations. Several Gippsland Medical School students participated in the meeting and presented work that they had undertaken relevant to community based education. This ensured that the Symposium incorporated a wide range of views to stimulate discussion.

A full account of the Symposium and copies of the presentations will appear on the Gippsland Medical School website in the next few weeks.

Next year’s Symposium will be based on simulation and will be organised by Professor Debra Nestel.
History of Medicine

On December 5th 2008 banners depicting 19th and 20th century medicine throughout the Gippsland area were launched.

Dr Ann Dettrick, a local historian and an Honorary Research Fellow at GMS, has spent the last four months visiting local historical societies, bush nursing hospitals, remote nursing areas and hospital libraries to gather the pictorial history of medicine in the Gippsland area. The launch was attended by local historians and descendants of people on the banners and was addressed by the Dean of the Medical School, Professor Chris Browne.

Dr Ann Dettrick, Honorary Research Fellow

Research

RDS3 Research Design and Statistical Support Service
The Gippsland Medical School has launched a Research Design and Statistical Support Service for Gippsland researchers. The RDS3 offers comprehensive support in quantitative research design, application, analysis and dissemination. Consultations are available on Mondays and Wednesdays by appointment. Contact Ms Lauren Snell on: 03 5122 6445 or rds3.queries@med.monash.edu.au.

Population Cancer Research
Research projects looking into the impact of breast cancer on out-of-pocket costs and return to work issues as well as rare forms of brain tumours are currently underway. Researchers at the Gippsland Medical School are in the early stages of establishing programs of activities in neoplastic conditions as they affect populations.

Research Snippets
In collaboration with Gippsland Regional Department of Human Services, Elmer has secured co-sponsorship of the 2009 Gippsland Health Promotion Conference through a VicHealth grant. The conference is scheduled to take place on 20th October in the Auditorium Gippsland campus.

Elmer has been invited to sit on the Medical Journal of Australia’s Content Management Committee which consist a small group of fifteen national experts serving to plot a course for the MJA.

And, finally Elmer has received a letter from a second medical student from Imperial College, London expressing an interest in gaining research experience over the northern hemisphere summer.
Matthew McGrail, a Melbourne boy born and bred, is now well on the way to establishing himself as a health researcher in Gippsland. He went to Melbourne High School and the University of Melbourne. He then took a job in the health insurance industry that brought him down to the Latrobe Valley.

Soon thereafter, Matthew was recruited by Dean Carson and Roger Strasser to work at the then Centre for Rural Health at LRH. He worked initially on some web-based projects and database developments, most notably the Echidna project. In mid 2004 he realised that a PhD was what was necessary to take his work further and eventually got together with John Humphreys to work on a project that explored the rurality classification systems.

Matthew recalled that “It all came from my frustration with the rurality indexes used by the government at that time…they measured remoteness or ‘rurality’, which don’t particularly measure access to health care. None of them were designed for a health application; they are just general geographical scales as such.”

John and Matthew decided that access was what they wanted to concentrate on, particularly rural access to primary care (GPs). The work resulted in the development of the “McGrail Index” of rural health access, although Matthew modestly says that “I have shied away from that name for the moment.”

Matthew developed the index with Victorian data, but feels that “it should translate to other states and other services; not necessarily hospitals but other services that have catchments that overlap such as dentists, pharmacists, optometrists or private allied health services.”

The work, which formed the basis of Matthew’s PhD is now beginning to be published both in Australia and internationally.

Among Matthew’s current projects is some work with John Humphreys on the MABEL (Medicine in Australia: Balancing Employment and Life) longitudinal project. One aspect that he is looking at is factors that influence decisions that underlie areas of workforce shortage in rural and remote Australia.

Matthew hopes to continue working on rural indices and is excited at the opportunity to work with big data sets. “I have always liked being a statistical support type person; I find it quite stimulating to help other people make the exciting research happen.”

Matthew, together with Elmer Villanueva, has just launched the Research Design Statistical Support Service (RDS3) for the Gippsland area. “We are offering the service not just to clinicians and health researchers but to all of the Gippsland campus academic staff. It is an exciting new opportunity; we are hoping that other people see it that way and think more broadly about the opportunities they can take up with our assistance.”

Matthew now sees himself as a Gippsland person. “My kids are born and bred here, attend school here, my wife has lived locally all her life…I’m very happy to stay here, particularly with its associated fantastic lifestyle.”

“Coming to the Gippsland campus in general and joining the GMS has been a different experience for me having always worked as a remote site person. Coming to work in a new medical school has been exciting; there is a great group of staff and it is a very enthusiastic place to be. Everyone is keen and friendly and supportive - all those sorts of things that make it an enjoyable workplace.”

I certainly wish Matthew a long and productive career with the Gippsland Medical School.

Chris Browne

Recent Publications


Student Office Bearers 2009

Year B commenced with the cohort now spread over four hospital sites around Victoria; Frankston, Traralgon, Sale and Warragul. Being exposed to the hospital environment for the first time has presented significant challenges and opportunities, namely finding our feet in the clinical environment and getting used to taking the reins for our own learning. Having the cohort spread all around Victoria has also presented a significant change, given how close we were during our first year of medicine.

The first “back to base” days took place recently back in Churchill, providing a great chance to catch up with friends, GMS staff and also meet the year A’s for the first time. It was obvious from the back to base days how much confidence students had gained in the hospitals in only the first few months of year B, and will be exciting to observe how everyone progresses further into the year.

What a distant memory the 27th of January seems to be right now!!

Ten weeks ago we arrived full of enthusiasm and ready for an inspirational first year. The first day, our anticipation began to morph into reality and the butterflies made way for the realisation of what lay ahead; a challenging and rewarding career in medicine. The Year A cohort have become extremely close in such a short period of time and have experienced great support from each other and the GMS faculty.

Through the challenges of the FOBS (Foundation of Biomedical Science) and mid semester exams we have truly begun to realise the challenges of this year. The faculty have been more than willing to listen to our ideas in regards to a range of issues; such as assessment and course content. The constant drive they possess to make the course the best it can be instils great confidence in the student body. Although it is only early on our careers the future and our resolve remains extremely positive.

Emily Fiske and Georgia Preece
Year B MUMUS representatives

Rick Davis and Ben Nally
Year A MUMUS representatives

Student Snapshot

The class of 2009 is the second cohort for Gippsland Medical School. The vast majority of this year’s new medical students have completed first degrees in science or health related disciplines, with the other students coming from previous studies in law, arts, engineering or commerce.

This year’s international students have come from Canada and Singapore compared with a more diverse range last year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of students</strong></td>
<td>75</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local students</strong></td>
<td>69</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International students</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male/Female</strong></td>
<td>31/44</td>
<td>23/36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average age at enrolment</strong></td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflections on 2008

Participating in the beginning of Gippsland Medical School meant embracing an abundance of opportunity and challenges. The excitement of starting what has been a life long ambition, to study medicine, was quickly brought into perspective alongside a year of hard-hitting academic rigour.

It would be inaccurate to look retrospectively and claim that Year A at GMS was a year similar to any other while studying full time at university. The academic program was much faster and more involved than anything I had previously experienced. I was constantly facing doubt of both my academic ability and my tenacity to remain focused and not lose sight of the bigger picture.

However it was possible to find moments of success, enjoyment and motivation throughout the year. Enjoyable moments often occurred through small inspirations, such as successfully taking a patient’s history for the first time, or drawing on the constant support of families and the staff of GMS. Overall the year taught me a great deal about myself, and how I need to behave in order to remain focused and driven to overcome obstacles that may come my way.

Emily Fiske
Year B MBBS Student

Contact

Gippsland Medical School
Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences
Monash University, Gippsland Campus
Northways Road, Churchill
Victoria 3842 Australia
Email: GippslandMed@med.monash.edu.au
www.med.monash.edu.au/

Disclaimer: While the information provided in this brochure was correct at the time of its publication, the university reserves the right to alter this information should the need arise.

CRICOS provider: Monash University 00008C. February 2009.