Young Bugs – Where are they now?

Elizabeth Pope

In early 1998, a group of postgraduate students met to discuss how to open up communication links between young microbiologists in Australia and how to best address issues relevant to budding microbiologists. The national *Student SIG* and the 'Young Bugs Banter' page in *Microbiology Australia* were born.

Julie Proffitt and I put together the backbones of YBB and co-edited 4 issues from March to November 1998. I continued to edit YBB until November 2000 when I handed the reigns over to Katie Coles in Western Australia.

While completing my PhD, I made the most of any opportunities that would give me more experience in science communication. I had the privilege of participating in a 6-week course run by one of Australia's first science journalists, Peter Pockley, with my resulting article published in *Australasian Science.* This experience confirmed in me my passion for writing, and the challenge of making science accessible to a non-scientific audience.

My first job was as a 'Medical Information Associate' in the pharmaceutical industry. I was looking for a role where I could still use my science education and interest in communication. The industry was unknown to me, but the role gave me the opportunity to learn a lot and prepare a vast range of communications relating to medical science. For a time I was also seconded to the Corporate Communications department, where I edited and produced three issues of the company magazine.

After 18 months, the company was taken over by one of the industry's 'big fish' and my position was made redundant. Another opportunity! In April 2003, I followed a dream and travelled to Cape Town to participate in a training program to become a tour guide for overland camping safaris in Eastern and Southern Africa. Not only did I learn about flora, fauna, geography, history, culture, geology, I also gained invaluable experience in presentation skills and communication (and learnt how to drive and fix a 12-tonne truck!). I worked as a guide for almost a year, before spending 3 months in the Okavango Delta in Botswana helping run a lodge and campsite.

I arrived back in Sydney in September 2004. I spent a long time looking for work, but eventually got my current job as a medical writer. I also started a graduate science communication course through Central Queensland University, and have become a member of the Australian Science Communicators.

Although the jobs I have held may seem quite different, they have all had elements that I value – communication, variety, people and science. My main goals are to keep doing what I enjoy, keep an open mind, and to always make the most of every opportunity. Science communicators, I believe, will be increasingly needed to interpret the vast number of science- and technology-related issues that are already impacting the lives of the general public. Hopefully I will be one of them!

Wendy McDonald

Kia ora, i rawahi, tawahi, i Aotearoa *(Hello, from across the ocean, from the land of the long white cloud)*

It has been a couple of years now since I was co-editing YBB with Natalie Marchello and in that time I have graduated with my PhD from RMIT University, changed jobs and countries and learnt how to order fsh'n'chps with a local accent. I am now living on the lower North Island of NZ and working with the Investigation and Diagnostic Centre – Wallaceville, Biosecurity, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The IDC comprises the NZ Animal Health Reference Laboratory and the Exotic Disease Response Centre and our main purpose is to maintain preparedness for an exotic disease incursion and undertake investigation and testing of suspect exotic diseases. The laboratory also provides testing to facilitate international trade.

My earlier work in Australia also centred around animal health, particularly microbiology and, since starting at IDC in November 2003, I have undertaken a variety of work, including developing a real-time PCR for the detection of *Coxiella burnetii* (NZ is free of Q fever), characterising unusual Brucella isolates,

managing the serological export testing, and a variety of roles including molecular bacteriologist, acting team leader for Immunology and Molecular Biology and, at present, acting team manager for Bacteriology.

The work is challenging and there is a need to be flexible and prepared to respond quickly to an exotic disease notification. For example, the recent Foot and Mouth Disease hoax instigated a spate of activity at IDC, both in terms of managing the field investigation and preparing for the possibility of laboratory testing if an animal presented with clinical symptoms.

When I am not busy at work my time is spent on our life-style block; gardening, fencing, looking after a few obligatory sheep and exploring NZ. There are some great walks, very nice wineries and the skiing is excellent. My challenges at the moment are to build the testing capability within Bacteriology at IDC and to learn how to play Celtic music on the mandolin.

WA Student Report 2004 – events and awards

Catherine Gangell

PhD student
Respiratory Medicine
Princess Margaret Hospital
Roberts Road, Subiaco, WA
E-mail: cgangell@cyllene.uwa.edu.au

The WA branch of the ASM provides many incentives throughout the year to promote excellence in the field of microbiology to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The ASM is also dedicated to promoting further education and employment in the microbiology field through career evenings organised for undergraduate students.

Student career evenings are held each year for undergraduate microbiology students at Curtin University and The University of Western Australia to provide them with information regarding employment and postgraduate study in the area of microbiology. In 2004, the student career evenings were well attended by enthusiastic students. This year the event will be held again in August with new guest speakers to promote the advantages of further education and employment in the microbiology field.

In 2004 The Curtin University ASM Award for excellence in Microbiology was awarded to Sim Yee Lean. The award was presented on 18 May by the branch president Suellen Blackaby at the Curtin Students Award night. Branch secretary, Nicola Barrett, presented the University of Western Australia award for excellence in microbiology to Clare Morgan on 10 May at The Faculty of Life and Physical Sciences Students Awards night at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery. Congratulations to both Sim and Clare for their dedication and hard work. Prizes are awarded annually to the value of $250 to the top student in second or third year microbiology at the respective universities.

Branch travel awards are also awarded annually to postgraduate microbiology students to attend the ASM national conference – last year in Sydney. Generally the WA branch provides three students with the opportunity to attend the conference. In 2004, one recipient was selected for the prestigious Becton-Dickinson Travel Award. Jenefer Hole from The University of Western Australia presented her research on Modulatory Effects of Bacterial Thiol-Activated Lysins and DNA on Respiratory Epithelial Cell Function.

Each year the WA branch of the ASM gives undergraduate students the opportunity to gain work experience in a research laboratory over the summer vacation break. The Student Vacation Scholarships are awarded at a value of $200 per week for 6 to 8 weeks for an undergraduate student studying microbiology to conduct a research project of their choice to gain experience in research life. The 2004 recipient of this award was Tessa Vanzetti from Curtin University who investigated Molecular Analyses of Viral Interference by HCV in Interferon-alpha Mediated Jak-STAT Signalling.

The Combined Biological Sciences Meeting is an event held biannually to promote biological science in WA by encouraging interaction of scientists, students and industry covering all the Life Sciences. As part of their endeavour to encourage excellence in the field of microbiology, the WA branch of the ASM provides a $300 prize to the best poster in the area of microbiology. As CBSM is a biannual event, no prize was awarded in 2004.

Awards for excellence are not only encouraged for microbiology students, but for lecturers and supervisors likewise. In 2004, The University of Western Australia was pleased to announce Associate Professor Barbara Chang, from the Discipline of Microbiology, as a receiver of the Postgraduate Research Supervisors Award.

Congratulations to all the WA microbiology students on their pursuit of excellence in the field of microbiology. The microbiology students would like to thank the ASM for the recognition of their effort.

Culture Media SIG

Alida Scholtes
Convenor Culture Media SIG
Peter Traynor MASM
Hon Sec Culture Media SIG

The past twelve months have been a prolific and productive time for the Culture Media Special Interest Group (SIG).

In October 2004, the SIG was pleased to announce the release of the completed and approved version of *Guidelines for Assuring Quality of Food and Water Microbiological Culture Media.* The Guidelines went through extensive preparation, including local, national and international review, and incorporated cross-references to Australian Standards for food microbiology (including recent updates of AS1766 series to AS5013 series), AS4276 series for water microbiology, and appropriate ISO standards.

This document is intended to offer guidance to food and water microbiology laboratories of any size, whether they prepare media in-house, purchase it commercially, or obtain it from a central facility within their greater organisation.

More than 100 copies have been distributed via email requests, nationally and overseas and many more copies accessed directly via the ASM website (to date there have been more than 3,500 'hits' on the document on the website). Feedback on the document and its usefulness, its user-friendliness and its relevance, from reviewers, auditors and end-users has been very positive.

The above Guidelines were followed up in April 2005 with the release of the completed and approved version of *Guidelines for Assuring Quality of Solid Media used in Australia for the Cultivation of Medically Important Mycobacteria.* Again, these Guidelines were subject to extensive preparation, including local, national and international review; endorsed by the ASM Standing Committee on Clinical Microbiology, their endorsement was then ratified by ASM National Council.

Many copies have been distributed via email requests, nationally and overseas, and many more copies accessed directly via the ASM website. We thank all those who have taken the time to express their thanks for this document and their comments and suggestions, as well as the many people who have contributed to the production of these documents from inception to final approved versions.

Ongoing projects include review of the 1996 issue of *Guidelines for Assuring Quality of Medical Bacteriological Culture Media* and the draft version of *Guidelines for Assuring Quality of Mycological Culture Media,* the latter as a joint project of members of the Culture Media SIG and members of the Mycology SIG.

The Culture Media SIG will be holding its AGM at the National Scientific meeting in Canberra this year, and plans are well underway for a Culture Media Symposium at the 2006 NSM in Queensland.

NSW BD Awards Night

The annual Becton-Dickenson Awards Night was held at Sydney University on 28 June. Seven students from a total of 12 applicants were selected to present their work.

As usual, the standard of presentations was very high and the judges had a difficult task in selecting the winner.

This year the winner of the NSW BD award was:

Geoff P. Doherty, from the University of Newcastle, School of Environmental and Life Sciences, Biological Sciences, for his paper entitled:

'**Composition of Transcription Complexes in *Bacillus subtilis.'***

The other entrants were :

Jane T. Aiken

Integrated Catchment and Environmental Management Group, University of Western Sydney

'A Bacterial Community Investigation of Soils Under Long Term Treated Effluent Irrigation.'

Julie Irish

School of Molecular and Microbial Biosciences, University of Sydney, NSW, Australia

'Honey Inhibits the Growth of Propionibacterium acnes.'

NSW BD Contestants: Back row: l to r Geoff Doherty, Julie Irish, Arinze Okoli, Dhana Rao, Jennifer Mak. Front row: Jane Aitken, Nadeem Kaakoush.

Nadeem O. Kaakoush

School of Biotechnology and Biomolecular Sciences, The University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW, Australia

'The Response of Campylobacter jejuni to Cadmium Chloride Stress.'

Jennifer K. Mak

School of Biotechnology and Biomolecular Sciences, the University of New South Wales, Sydney 2052, Australia.

'Comparison of Integron Integrase Activity Measured Using Real-time Polymerase Chain Reaction.'

Arinze S. Okoli

School of Biotechnology and Biomolecular Sciences, The University of New South Wales, Sydney.

'Investigation of Helicobacter Hepaticus Response to Bile Stress.'

Dhana Rao

Centre for Marine Biofouling and Bio-innovation, School of Biotechnology and Biomolecular Sciences, University of New South Wales, Sydney NSW 2052, Australia.

'Biofilm formation and antifouling activity of epiphytic bacteria on the green alga Ulva lactuca.'

ASM South Australian Branch Report

It has been another busy year for the SA branch. Our 2004 AGM speaker was Professor John Turnidge from the Division of Laboratory Medicine, Women's and Children's Hospital who enlightened and informed us about "Everything you wanted to know about NCCLS, but were too afraid to ask". In September Assoc. Prof. Paul Chan from the Chinese University of Hong Kong visited SA and spoke about the recent SARS epidemic. We finished the year on a multicultural note with the Christmas party at the Chapel Cafe and SA Migration Museum. In April 2005 we held the Becton Dickinson student awards and six students gave presentations. All were of a very high standard. Recently, Dr Diana Martin from the Institute of Environmental Science and Research in Porirua, New Zealand gave a seminar entitled "From bean counting to controlling an epidemic in 15 years: New Zealand's Meningococcal Disease Story".

We are now looking forward to a number of events in July as we welcome Dr Andrew Darcy from the Solomon Islands, hold our AGM and have the opportunity to hear from Prof Julian Rood. Also , SA Committee members, Andrew Butcher, Andrew Laurence and Bill Winslow organized an exciting Program for the 2005 Tri-State meeting: "Mangoes, Mudcrabs And Microbiology" which was held in Darwin on July 8 and 9.

Antimicrobial SIG workshop in Canberra 2005

Antimicrobial resistance determinants and laboratory diagnostics: detecting bacterial resistance

John Merlino

National Antimicrobial SIG Convenor – Australian Society for Microbiology

In 2005 in Canberra, the Antimicrobial Special Interest Group Workshop on Antimicrobial Resistance will focus on 'Resistance markers, Nucleic Acid Technology, Bacterial Population Analysis and Applications for the routine Laboratories in Detecting Resistance' with key expert overseas speaker, Professor Alex van Belkum and a local panel of scientific experts. The key question posed at the workshop will be what to look for and 'what does the future hold in detecting and screening for resistance for our laboratories?', especially when dealing with evolving resistance in many species of bacteria.

A key factor in the development of antibiotic resistance is the ability of infectious organisms to adapt quickly to new environmental conditions. Bacteria are single-celled creatures that, compared with higher life forms, have small numbers of genes. Therefore, even a single random gene mutation can greatly affect their ability to cause disease. As most microbes reproduce by dividing every few hours, bacteria can evolve rapidly. A mutation or acquisition of a gene that helps a microbe survive exposure to an antibiotic drug will quickly become dominant throughout the microbial population. Microbes also often acquire genes, including those that code for resistance, from each other. The advantage microbe's gain from their innate adaptability is augmented by the widespread. The table below modified from a recent review from Harbarth and Samore [4] summarises the bacterial pathogen and determinant factors controlling resistance and some potential control measures and interventions.

Other potential determinants influencing future dissemination and control of antimicrobial resistance include prescribing practices, population characteristics and politics – healthcare policies.

From the laboratory point of view, accurate and rapid diagnostic methods are needed to guide antimicrobial therapy and infection control interventions. While standardised phenotypic methods such as CLSI (NCCLS), CDS and BSAC are available and commonly employed by many routine laboratories to detect resistance in many organisms, advances in Nucleic Acid Technology (NAT) (such as DNA probes, PCR, Real-time PCR, DNA sequencing) have provided some laboratories with a user-friendly, rapid and reproducible testing platform. Allowing the use of genetic assays as part of a wider routine strategy to detect resistance markers and minimise the development and spread of antimicrobial-resistant in bacteria. Molecular diagnostics may increase diagnostic accuracy with a YES (presence) or NO (absence) answer for a defined resistance determinant and enable more prudent antimicrobial drug use in the future [2]. DNA amplification technology and simplified phenotypic automation opens the potential for rapid testing with efficiency in turn around times.

Some microbiologists predict that future refinements in molecular techniques will likely revolutionise the way bacterial susceptibility testing is performed in the clinical laboratory [3]. Others [1, 2] believe that because of their high specificity, molecular methods will not detect newly emerging resistance mechanisms and are unlikely to be useful in detecting resistance genes in species where the gene has not been observed previously. Novel silent genes and pseudogenes may cause false positive results. Mutations in primer binding sites may preclude PCR amplification causing false-negative results. In addition, the presence of a

Determinant	Potential control measures and interventions
Evolution	Evolutionary engineering
Survival fitness	Inhibition of microbial gene
Virulence	Gene expression
Commensal flora	Antibodies, antipathogenicity drugs, biologic response modifiers Probiotics
Laboratory detection and identification	Improved rapid diagnostic tests e.g. Real-time PCR and other Nucleic Acid Technology

resistance gene does not exclude the possibility of resistance from another mechanism. The application of genetic assays for detection of antimicrobial resistance is also dependent upon potential cost-savings and user friendly formats of the techniques[1].

There is a need for genetic assays to be validated and quality assured. It is obligatory to perform an in-house validation of PCR methods using guidelines set by regulatory bodies (e.g. such as NPAAC, TGA, NATA) before they can be used for clinical diagnostic purposes. The availability of commercial kits with integrated amplification and detection, built-in controls, etc, may overcome some of the problems associated with 'in-house' tests.

Finally, I hope that the workshop will demonstrate that there is an increased awareness of the genetic and phenotypic diversity that bacteria display, even within the limitations of the species' boundaries. Population genetics and dynamics are important fundamental topics in relation to clinical diagnostics and antimicrobial resistance. The fact that different populations can differ in their pathogenic potential is important, and investigations into this field have been facilitated by a wide array of novel molecular techniques. This has revolutionised a new form of molecular diagnostics combining an assessment of a certain pathogen with the detection of antimicrobial resistance and microbial virulence genes. One example is MRSA carrying the mecA gene and panton-valentine leukocidin (PVL) gene. The combination of antimicrobial resistance and so-called virulence profiling will be an important feature of future diagnostics. This approach may facilitate the distinction between colonisation and disease. The distinction of genuine pathogens from commensal or colonising flora may have a limiting effect on the prophylactic use of antibiotics. This might help prevent the development of antimicrobial resistance among clinically relevant organisms[5].

As the ASM National Convenor of the Antimicrobial Special Interest Group, I invite all ASM members with an interest in molecular testing with applications in detecting antimicrobial resistance to attend this workshop in Canberra at this year's annual scientific meeting. Your views and participation will be greatly appreciated.

Registration and details of the event have been posted on the ASM 2005 National website http://www.asm2005.org/ .

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4. Harbarth S, Samore MA. Antimicrobial resistance determinants and future control. Emerg Infect Dis [serial on the Internet]. 2005 Jun [date cited]. Available from http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/vol11no06/05-0167.htm
5. van Belkum A. Molecular diagnostic in medical microbiology: yesterday, today and tomorrow. Current *Opinion in Pharmacology.* 2003, 3:497-501.

ASM Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 27th September 2005

Menzies Theatre, National Convention Centre, Canberra

There will be an Extraordinary General Meeting starting at 5:20pm

The ASM Annual General Meeting will start at 5:35 in the same theatre.

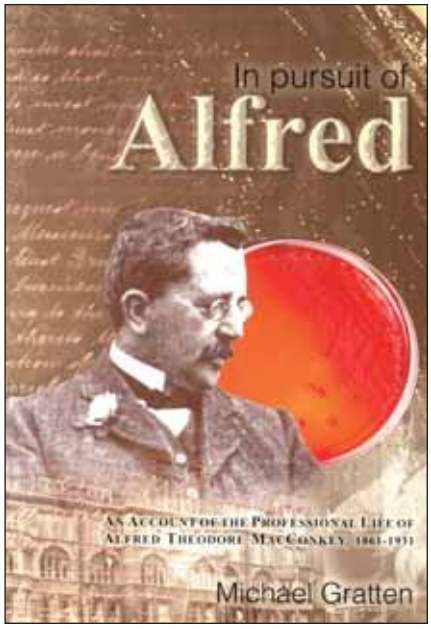
Australian Academy of Science

Call for nominations

Awards for scientific excellence for junior and senior researchers

Nominations are invited from senior and junior researchers for awards for outstanding research in the natural sciences. Nominations close 30 August 2005. Information about the awards is available at http://www.science.org.au/awards.

Please send all enquiries to the Awards Section of the Academy at: ac@science.org.au <mailto:ac@science.org.au>



In pursuit of Alfred: An account of the professional life of Alfred Theodore MacConkey, 1986–1931 by Michael Gratten

Michael Gratten is well known to microbiologists who work in medical laboratory science in Australia and New Zealand. Most recently, before his retirement, he was known for his work in pneumococcal typing in Brisbane as part of the Queensland Health Scientific Service.

Mike's interest in the history of bacteriology is known to his colleagues and is in abundant evidence in this professional biography of MacConkey, whose agar is used every day in nearly all medical laboratories.

The book is short, but Mike has gone to significant trouble to track down details on MacConkey's life. This extends to visiting the Central Library and Record Office to examine archival material and also the church where MacConkey's father was the incumbent vicar.

Despite MacConkey being a household name amongst pathologists, medical laboratory scientists and environmental microbiologists the world over, information about the name behind the agar and the broth is sparse.

The dream of the time was to develop a solid phase medium capable of differentiating Salmonella Typhi from other enteric bacteria. MacConkey knew that bile salts were going to be integral to any formulation and worked for years before defining the media that bears his name.

What many will not know is that MacConkey graduated as a medical practitioner and worked as a general practitioner before deciding upon a research career in bacteriology. In addition, for many years MacConkey headed the Serum Department of the Jenner Institute (formerly the British institute of Preventive Medicine). From 1901-1906, MacConkey was the Assistant Bacteriologist and was Head from 1906 to his retirement in 1926. During World War I, MacConkey played a key role in developing an antiserum for tetanus.

On his retirement, MacConkey lived with his wife and tended his garden where he continued to pursue a love of roses. The book contains facsimiles of many interesting documents, including MacConkey's last will and testament. Mike makes a point of emphasising some interesting facets of this document, notably MacConkey's desire that his wife should have nothing to do with a Roman Catholic and that none of the proceeds from life should benefit Roman Catholicism. One could interpret from Mike's writing that MacConkey's father, an Anglican Vicar was possibly 'low church' based on his letters criticising the Cathedral System of the Church. MacConkey's antipathy towards Roman Catholicism may have roots in his early home life.

Another interesting fact about MacConkey is his name change from McConkey to MacConkey early in his career.

This book, while short, can be a little difficult to read if you are after a simple biography. It will appeal to hard core microbiologists who understand the importance of biochemistry to our science and the need to embrace the history of taxonomy as a guide to understanding why we name bacteria the way we do.

The appendices also provide some solid snippets of fact that make this book worthy of any laboratory bookshelf as a good read and as a reference for some obscure facts about a great man of our science's history.

Reviewed by Gary Lum

O R D E R F O R M

This book is available for $24.95.

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New Guidelines Released

The Culture Media and the Mycobacteria Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are pleased to announce the release of the completed and approved version of their latest document

'Guidelines for Assuring Quality of Solid Media used in Australia for the Cultivation of Medically Important Mycobacteria'

The Guidelines have gone through extensive preparation, including local, national and international review; endorsed by the ASM Standing Committee on Clinical Microbiology, their endorsement has now been ratified by ASM National Council.

The document will be available for download from the ASM website, or by email as below.

Peter Traynor MASM
Hon Sec Culture Media SIG
peter.traynor@oxoid.com.au

Frank Haverkort MASM
Mycobacteria SIG
Frank.Haverkort@health.wa.gov.au

Meetings

Contributions listing relevant meetings are welcome. Please send to: <editor@theasm.com.au>

2005

20-24 August
Melbourne Convention Centre

7th World Congress on Inflammation 2005

www.inflammation2005.com.
EarlyBird Registration Deadline: 20th June, 2005
Contact:
Madeleine Cullity
Congress Manager
ICMS Pty Ltd
84 Queensbridge Street
Southbank VIC 3006
Phone: +61 3 9682 0244
Facsimile: +61 3 9682 0288
http:/www.icms.com.au/

August 24-27 2005
Hobart, Australia

17th Annual Conference of the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine (ASHM)

The ASHM Conference is Australasia's premier HIV conference and brings together the range of disciplines including basic science, clinical medicine, epidemiology and prevention, nursing and allied health, public health, social research, education, policy, community programs and primary care, involved in HIV and hepatitis management.
The 2005 ASHM Conference will be run back-to-back with the Australasian Sexual Health Conference 2005, which represents an excellent opportunity for delegates to attend both conferences.
Summary of Deadlines:
30 June 2005 - Earlybird Registration Deadline (CLOSING SOON)
21 July 2005 - Accommodation Booking Deadline
11 August 2005 - Registration Deadline
For further information on both the ASHM & Sexual Health Conferences visit www.ashm.org.au/conference2005; or contact conferenceinfo@ashm.org.au or call 02 8204 0774.

22-24 August
Hobart

2005 Sexual Health Conference

Information: Nicole Robertson, as above

4-8 September
Surfers Paradise Marriott Resort

13th International Workshop on Campylobacter, Helicobacter and Related Organisms "CHRO" '05

Web: www.chro2005.com

25-29 September 2005
National Convention Centre, Canberra

2005 Annual Conference of the Australian Society for Microbiology

Chair: George McLean
Conference Manager: Janette Sofronidis
Australian Society for Microbiology
E-mail: janette@theasm.com.au
Website: www.asm2005.org

14-16 November
Chiang Mai, Thailand

International Leptospirosis Society 4th Scientific Meeting

Web: www.ils2005.org

2006

2-6 July
Gold Coast Convention & Exhibition Centre, Gold Coast

ASM 2006, Gold Coast

Annual Scientific Meeting & Exhibition for the Australian Society for Microbiology
Chair: Phil Giffard
Conference Manager:
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Australian Society for Microbiology
E-mail: janette@theasm.com.au

10-15 September
Cairns Convention Centre, Cairns Qld

IPNC 2006 – 15th International Pathogenic Neisseria Conference '06

Co-convenors:
John Davies & Michael Jennings
Conference Manager: Janette Sofronidis
Australian Society for Microbiology
E-mail: janette@theasm.com.au
Website: www.ipnc2006.org

15-18 October
Amsterdam, Netherlands

6th International Conference of the Hospital Infection Society

Contact: Congress Secretariat
HIS 2006, Concorde Services Ltd
4B/50 Spiers Wharf, Glasgow G4 9TB
Tel: (44) 141 331 0123
Fax: (44) 141 331 0234
E-mail: info@his2006.com
Web: www.his2006.com

29 October–1 November
Crown Promenade Hotel, Melbourne

VTEC 2006
The 6th International Symposium on Shiga Toxin (Verocytotoxin) producing Escherichia coli infections

Chair: Elizabeth Hartland
Conference Manager: Janette Sofronidis
Australian Society for Microbiology
E-mail: janette@theasm.com.au
Website: www.vtec2006.org

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BRANCH SECRETARIES

ACT
Dr Nicholas Medveczky
TGAL Immunology
PO Box 100
Woden, ACT 2606
Tel: (02) 6232 8491
E-mail: nicholas.medveczky@health.gov.au

NSW
Helen Ziochos
Liverpool Hospital
Department of Microbiology
PO Box 103
Liverpool, NSW 2170
Tel: (02) 9828 5144
E-mail: helen.ziochos@swsahs.nsw.gov.au

Qld
Dr Patrick Blackall
Animal Research Institute
Locked Mail Bag 4
Moorooka, Qld 4105
Tel: (07) 3362 9498
E-mail: blackap@dpi.qld.gov.au

SA
Dr Eveline Bartowsky
Research Microbiologist
The Australian Wine Research Institute
PO Box 197
Glen Osmond, SA 5064
Tel: (08) 8303 6600
E-mail: Eveline.Bartowsky@awri.com.au

Tas
Ms Sarah Foster
LGH, Cnr Franklin and Charles Streets
Launceston, Tas 7250
Tel: (03) 6348 7670
E-mail: sarah_anne_74@hotmail.com

Vic
Dr Enzo Palombo
Senior Lectuer
Swinburne Universoty of Technology
School of Engineering & Science
PO Box 318, Hawthorn, Vic 3122
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WA
Miss Nicola Barrett
Microbiology Dept, Royal Perth Hospital
Wellington Street, Perth, WA 6000
Tel: (08) 9224 2444
E-mail: nicola.barrett@health.wa.gov.au

NT (sub branch)
Mr Kevin Freeman
12 Beacon Court, Palmerston, NT 0830
Tel: (08) 8922 8685
E-mail: kevin.freeman@nt.gov.au

CONVENORS OF ASM STANDING COMMITTEES

ASM Foundation
Dr Ray Akhurst
CSIRO, Division of Entomology
GPO Box 1700, Canberra, ACT 2601
Tel: (02) 6246 4123
E-mail: ray.akhurst@ento.csiro.au

BioSafety
Mr Lee Smythe, Supervising Scientist
WHO/FAO/OIE Collaborating Centre for Reference & Research on Leptospirosis
Queensland Health Scientific Services
39 Kessels Rd, Coopers Plains, QLD 4108
Tel: (07) 3274 9064 Fax: (07) 3274 9175
E-mail: Lee_Smythe@health.qld.gov.au

Clinical Microbiology
Dr Stephen Graves
Director of Microbiology
Hunter Area Pathology Service (HAPS)
John Hunter Hospital, Newcastle, NSW
Tel: (02) 4921 4420
Mobile: 0407 506 380
Fax: (02) 4921 4440
E-mail: stephen.graves@hunter.health.nsw.gov.au

Ethics Committee
Emeritus Prof Nancy Millis
University of Melbourne
School of Microbiology
Parkville, Vic 3052
Tel: (03) 9344 5707
E-mail: jmjohn@unimelb.edu.au

National Scientific Advisory Committee
Dr Hatch Stokes
Dep of Biological Sciences
Macquarie University, NSW 2109
Tel: (02) 9850 8164
E-mail: hstokes@rna.bio.mq.edu.au

Publications/Editorial Board
Dr Ailsa Hocking
CSIRO, Div Food Science & Technology
PO Box 52, North Ryde, NSW 2113
Tel: (02) 9490 8520
E-mail: ailsa.hocking@foodscience.afisc.csiro.au

Research Trust Advisory & Development Committee
Assoc Prof Elizabeth Dax
National Serology Reference Laboratory
4 Fl, Healy Building
41 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy, Vic 3065
Tel: (03) 9418 1111
E-mail: liz@nrl.gov.au

CONVENORS OF ASM SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

Division 1

Antimicrobials
John Merlino
Concord Repatriation General Hospital
Microbiology and Infectious Diseases
Hospital Road, Concord, NSW 2173
Tel: (02) 9767 6658
E-mail: merlinoj@email.cs.nsw.gov.au

Mycobacteria
Taryn Crighton, Hospital Scientist
Mycobacterium Reference Laboratory
Centre for Infectious Diseases and Microbiology Laboratory Services
ICPMR, Westmead Hospital,
Westmead,NSW 2145
Tel: (02)9845-6240 Fax:(02)98938659
Email: tarync@icpmr.wsahs.nsw.gov.au

Mycology
Dr Weiland Meyer, Westmead Hospital
ICPMR CIDMLS Microbiology
Level 2, Room 3114A
Darcy Road, Westmead, NSW 2145
Tel: (02) 8344 5701
E-mail: w.meyer@usyd.edu.au

Mycoplasmatales
Dr Steven Djordjevic
Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute
Private Mail Bag 8, Camden, NSW 2570
Tel: (02) 4640 6426
E-mail: steve.djordevic@agric.nsw.gov.au

Ocular Microbiology
Dr Mark Willcox
University of New South Wales
Rupert Myers Building, Sydney, NSW 2052
Tel: (02) 9385 7524
E-mail: m.willcox@crcert.unsw.edu.au

Parasitology and Tropical Medicine
Mrs Janice Stavropoulos
Liverpool Hospital, Microbiology Dept
Locked Bag 7090, Liverpool BC, NSW 1871
Tel: (02) 9828 5138
E-mail: janice.stavropoulos@swsahs.nsw.gov.au

Public Health Microbiology
Dr Geoffrey Hogg
University of Melbourne
Microbiological Diagnostic Unit
Parkville, Vic 3052
Tel: (03) 8344 5713
E-mail: g.hogg@mdu.unimelb.edu.au

Clinical Serology & Molecular
David Dickeson
Serology Manager, Centre for Infectious Diseases & Microbiology Lab Services
Level 3, ICPMR, Westmead Hospital
Westmead, NSW 2145
Tel: (02) 9845 6861 Fax: (02) 9633 5314
E-mail: davidd@icpmr.wsahs.nsw.gov.au

Veterinary Microbiology
Dr Glenn Browning
The University of Melbourne
Vet Preclinic Centre
Gratton Street, Parkville, Vic 3052
Tel: (03) 8344 7342
E-mail: glenfb@unimelb.edu.au

Women's and Children's Microbiology
Convenor:
Dr Suzanne Garland
Royal Children's Hospital
Microbiology, 132 Grattan Street
Melbourne, Vic 8045
Tel: (03) 9344 2476
E-mail: garlands@cryptic.rch.unimelb.edu.au
Secretary:
Mr Andrew Lawrence
Women's & Children's Hospital
Microbiology & Infectious Diseases Dept
72 King William Rd, Nth Adelaide, SA 5006
Tel: (08) 8204 6376
E-mail: lawrencea@wch.s.gov.au

Division 2

Virology
Dr Paul Young
University of Queensland
Microbiology & Parasitology
St Lucia, Qld 4072
Tel: (07) 3636 8718
E-mail: p.young@mailbox.uq.oz.au

Division 3

AquaSIG – Water Microbiology
Mr Ed Stuttard
EML Consulting Services
1/148 Tennyson Memorial Drive
Tennyson, Qld 4105
Tel: (07) 3898 3622
E-mail: ed.stuttard@eml.com.au

Computers
Mr Paul Hakendorf
Flinders Medical Centre
Clinical Epidemiology & Health Outcomes Unit
Bedford Park, SA 5042
Tel: (08) 8204 5327 Ext 4451
E-mail: paul.hakendorf@flinders.edu.au

Cosmetics and Pharmaceuticals
Dr Paul Priscott
AMS Laboratories
118 Hattersley Street
Rockdale, NSW 2216
Tel: (02) 9567 8544
E-mail: applied@tig.com.au

Culture Collections
Mrs Laura Maddock
University of Tasmania
School of Agriculture Science
GPO Box 252-54
Hobart, Tas 7001
Tel: (03) 6226 2628
E-mail: laura.maddock@utas.edu.au

Culture Media
Ms Alida Scholtes
University of Melbourne
Media Preparation Unit
Dept of Microbiology & Immunology
Parkville, Vic 3052
Tel: (03) 9347 9821
E-mail: alida@unimelb.edu.au

Education
Ms Cheryl Power
University of Melbourne
Dept Microbiology
Parkville, Vic 3052
Tel: (03) 8344 0332
E-mail: cheryljp@unimelb.edu.au

Food Microbiology
Mr Glen Higgs
Food Science Australia
Microbiology & Production Hygience
PO Box 3312
Tingalpa DC, Qld 4173
Tel: (07) 3214 2000
E-mail: glen.higgs@foodscience.afisc.csiro.au

Laboratory Management SIG
Mr Dennis Mok, Captain,
Officer in Charge, Laboratory Platoon
1st Health Support Battalion
Holsworthy Barracks
Holsworthy NSW 2173
Tel: (02) 9600 1335
E-mail: dennis.mok@defence.gov.au

Microbial Ecology
Dr John Bowman
University of Tasmania Antarctica CRC
GPO Box 252-80, Hobart, Tas 7001
Tel: (03) 6226 2776
E-mail: john.bowman@utas.edu.au

Probiotic & Enteric Microbial Diversity SIG
Dr James Chin, NSW Agriculture
PO Box 128, Glenfiled, NSW 2167
Tel: (02) 4640 6359
E-mail: james.chin@agric.nsw.gov.au

Rapid Methods
Vacant

Students
Vacant

Division 4

Microbial Physiology
Dr Rick Cavicchioli
University of New South Wales
School of Microbiology & Immunology
Sydney, NSW 2052
Tel: (02) 9385 3516
E-mail: r.cavicchioli@unsw.edu.au

Molecular Microbiology
Associate Professor Liz Harry
Institute for the Biotechnology of Infectious Diseases
University of Technology, Sydney
PO Box 123, Broadway
NSW 2007 Australia
Tel: 61 2 9514 4173
Fax: 61 2 9514 4021