

Obituary: Dr Leila Valerie Asche, PhD, AM, PhD (hon) CDU

Leila Valerie James was born at Rupanyup in western Victoria in 1927. She attended local schools and continued her education despite significant family hardship. After matriculating from Ballarat High School she achieved her dream of going to The University of Melbourne and in 1944 commenced her BSc while living in nearby Brunswick. At Easter she fell ill with pleurisy. After a local GP drained 3 pints of fluid from her pleural cavity, she was sent home to rest, devastated to leave the university and her new friends. The word 'tuberculosis' (TB) was never mentioned to her.

In 1945 she returned and completed first year BSc, beginning second year in 1946. In July a letter arrived, telling her 'your bed is waiting for you at Greenvale Sanatorium', a great shock as she had not been told she had TB. Sanatorium life was very restrictive, with many hours of rest timetabled, few activities available and minimal visiting hours at weekends. In spite of these constraints, Val read widely and developed a love of needlecraft that lasted through her busy life. This was prior to the availability of antibiotics to treat TB and people were regularly dying around her. Also, assessment testing was done only every three months, so release could take many months. In 1947 Val was given barbaric surgery, involving a 38 cm cut down her back to enable ribs to be removed to immobilise the upper part of the lung, all done under local anaesthetic (supposedly to prevent spread to the other lung). Streptomycin became available only in the late 1940s, but the three doses Val received were inadequate for treatment.

She returned to the University after discharge from Greenvale in January 1948 and continued her degree; however, in 1949 the infection had spread to the right lung, subsequently requiring readmission to Greenvale and an artificial pneumothorax was performed in 1950. After release, she completed her 2nd year BSc from home in 1951. Medical experts later believed that she had contracted TB many years earlier while sharing a ward in Ballarat Hospital with a TB patient. She later wrote of her experiences in *Walking My Baby Back Home – My Journey with TB without Antibiotics*, one of her many books.

In 1952 Valerie commenced life at Janet Clarke Hall and completed her BSc, then MSc and commenced PhD research under Professor Sydney Rubbo, working on urinary tract infections in people with spinal injury. She was a tutor, demonstrator and then Principal Tutor at The University of Melbourne, and also a resident tutor at

Janet Clarke Hall for 5 years, completing her PhD in 1975. During these years she also worked as a consultant with Westminster Carpets.

In 1958, at a Trinity College party, Val met barrister Austin Asche, originally from the Northern Territory. They were married 3 months later and subsequently had two children, Harry and Wendy. Austin later became the first Victorian Judge of the Family Court of Australia.

In the early to mid-1980s, Val was the Director of the Clinical Department of Microbiology at the Queen Victoria Medical Centre – at this time an exceptional position for a woman and a scientist. As this was Monash University's teaching hospital for obstetrics, gynaecology and paediatrics, Val also held the post of Senior Lecturer. Those who worked with her in the laboratories and taught classes for her, speak of her excellent work and her great ability to interact with medical colleagues, scientists and students.

In 1986 Austin Asche was made a Judge of the Northern Territory Supreme Court and the couple moved to Darwin. Val was immediately appointed Senior Research Officer in the Microbiology Unit at the Menzies School of Health Research and Sessional Microbiologist at Royal Darwin Hospital. This, her first opportunity to participate widely in research, was very important to her. She held these positions until 1994. Under her leadership, research covered many fields, particularly involving diseases prevalent in the Northern Territory, including melioidosis and sexually transmitted infections. Val authored more than 40 papers, including the first from the southern hemisphere to report on the isolation of *Chlamydia pneumoniae*. She and her team always took great care to consider the comfort and sensibilities of the indigenous members of the community.

Meanwhile Austin Asche was appointed as Chief Administrator of the Northern Territory and the couple moved into Government House. During this period Val became patron of at least 35 community organisations. She saw that her role was to support and encourage these varied organisations.

On retirement from her Menzies post she was awarded the Menzies School of Health Research Medallion for outstanding service to the School, and in 1994 was appointed to the

Governing Board of the Menzies School of Health Research. While the Menzies Research Institute was initially linked to Sydney University, Val was an important figure supporting the formation and running of the new Charles Darwin University. She became chairman of both Community Radio 8 TopFM and the Australian South East Asian Rehabilitation Foundation, which sends medical teams to Timor and Flores. In 2002 she chaired the Task Force on Illicit Drugs in the Northern Territory, commissioned by the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly.

Over her working life, Val has given great service to microbiology and to the Australian Society for Microbiology. She was Treasurer of the ASM National Council 1978–1984, then Membership Secretary 1984–1986. She edited six editions of *Recent Advances in Micro-*

biology, then became Chairman of the Northern Territory branch of the ASM. She also convened the Trust to raise \$2m for scholarships for young microbiologists. Portions of her interviews are in the Golden Jubilee issue of *Microbiology Australia*.

Dr Valerie Asche was an extraordinary woman, participating deeply in many aspects of life, especially in the Northern Territory. Scientist, community leader, craftswoman and friend to many. Her awards include: Distinguished Service Award Australian Society of Microbiology 1991; Dame of the Order of St John of Jerusalem 1993; Women's Achievement Award for Outstanding Contribution to Northern Territory 1998; Distinguished Service Award of Australia 2000; Senior Australian of Year 2000; and Member of the Order of Australia 2001.

An updated view on bacterial glycogen structure

Liang Wang and Michael J Wise

The authors advise that in Figure 1 of their published article (*Microbiology Australia*, Volume 40, Issue 4, pages 195–199, doi:10.1071/MA19056) they linked GlgE directly with branched (glucosyl units)_n. In fact, GlgE should work together with GlgB to synthesise glycogen. In addition, although Rv3032 was initially postulated to have a possible role in glycogen metabolism, recent study has shown no detectable evidence to support this postulation. The authors apologise for this error and state that this does not change the scientific conclusions of the article in any way. The correct Figure 1 is shown below.

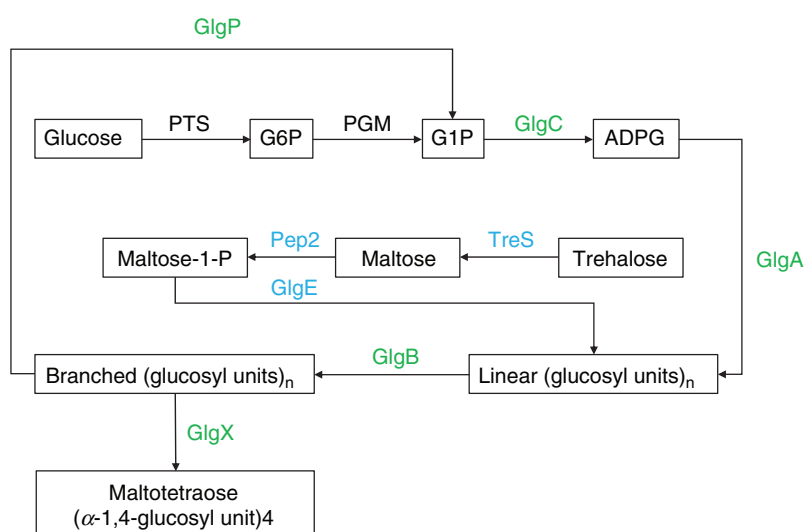


Figure 1. Schematic illustration of classical and non-classical glycogen metabolism pathways⁵. PTS, phosphotransferase system; PGM, phosphoglucomutase; G6P, glucose-6-phosphate; G1P, glucose-1-phosphate; ADPG, ADP-glucose.