

# under the microscope

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## A healthy partnership

Kimberly-Clark Australia (KCA) has come on board with CMRI in a very big way by forming an alliance to support CMRI research in a variety of ways.

"We wish to build a long term relationship, with the aim of increasing awareness of health issues affecting the well-being of all Australians now and in the future," says Wayne Jones, Managing Director, Kimberly-Clark Australia. "It is pleasing to support an organisation that has a goal consistent with our own, of 'caring for the community'".

As a major part of their support KCA have set up a Kimberly-Clark Research Fellowship to support the salary of one scientist. The first recipient of this Fellowship is Dr David Loebel of the Embryology Unit. The goal of Dr Loebel's research is to discover new genes that are involved in mammalian development and shed light on how congenital abnormalities might occur in babies.

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*Alan Wiseman, Manager, Corporate Human Resources from Kimberly-Clark Australia (left), on a recent visit to CMRI, with Dr David Loebel (seated) and Professor Peter Row.*



# Director's desk



## History shows the way

The scientific sceptics in our society often ask the medical research community to justify our goals and even our existence in terms of providing clear-cut evidence of the application of our work to the improvement of the human

condition. More importantly, in an era where governments are demanding cost/benefit analyses to define resource allocations within their budgets, the purported economic benefits are often the ultimate defining parameter.

It is very rare for a singular research observation to have an immediate clinical impact in terms of disease treatment or prevention. Most apparently unique observations are built upon the work of many others and many years of careful refining and testing are required before significant changes occur in patient management and these are often so imperceptible that very few realise what has happened.

There are rare exceptions to this of course and recently I was prompted to look at the work of Dr Earl Owen who was a pioneer in the field of microsurgery both in Australia and internationally. Dr Owen was a staff member of the CMRI (then Foundation) from 1967 to 1970 on returning from postgraduate training in the field of organ transplantation in London. Realising the importance of effective repair of nerves and blood vessels in graft survival, he developed the field of microsurgery by designing techniques and instrumentation to achieve these goals. Dr Owen is a unique individual, who has effectively pursued his own goals. As with all pioneers, he certainly has had his share of critics and opponents but it is safe to say that the adoption of the techniques, now a routine component of surgical procedures in many fields, would have been considerably delayed in their application if he had not been so single-minded in his approach.

In contrast to this, it is difficult to evaluate now the ultimate benefit to cancer management of the unique observations by Roger Reddel's Cancer Research Unit of the alternative mechanism for telomere maintenance in cancer cells. This may well lead to the direct development of more effective cancer drug treatments or it may simply be yet another step towards achieving a better understanding of cancer cell biology.

It is often very difficult to predict whether any scientific observation, no matter how groundbreaking, will proceed from "bench to bedside", but there is no question that the scientific advances of the past fifty years have led to a massive improvement in the quality of life.

Professor Peter Rowe



Dr David Loebel with Wayne Jones, Managing Director of Kimberly-Clark Australia (right) at Kimberly-Clark Australia's head office in Milson's Point, Sydney.

 **Kimberly-Clark** Australia Pty Limited

 **Children's Medical Research Institute**

## Sharing similar values...

*Continued from page 1...*

"It is particularly commendable that Kimberly-Clark Australia has chosen to provide a fellowship both because it builds a long-term relationship between the organisations and also directly supports the development of Australian scientists," said Dr Loebel.

KCA's support also extends to supplying CMRI with goods in-kind and they are putting their expertise into upgrading CMRI's promotional video in 2003. The five-minute video is a wonderful way to give CMRI supporters an overview of our background, our research programs and the urgent need for basic research into genetic disorders.

*"The two organisations share similar values in terms of caring for others, excellence and teamwork. We're really grateful and excited to gain their support" Stephen Ryall, CMRI*

KCA employees will also have the opportunity to team together for fundraising events for CMRI and have already been strong participants in Jeans for Genes Day for many years. They will get the chance through education forums to become more informed about CMRI and genetic research. KCA is establishing a salary deduction option whereby any of their 1816 employees can donate monthly contributions as an automatic salary deduction.

"The two organisations share similar values in terms of caring for others, excellence and teamwork. We're really grateful and excited to gain their support," says Stephen Ryall, Manager, Community Relations and Administration at CMRI.

# Top **NHMRC** honour for **CMRI** cancer researcher

Congratulations to Dr Roger Reddel, Head of the Cancer Research Unit, who has been awarded a Senior Principal Research Fellowship (SPRF) by the Australian Government's research funding body, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). This is the highest level of award granted.

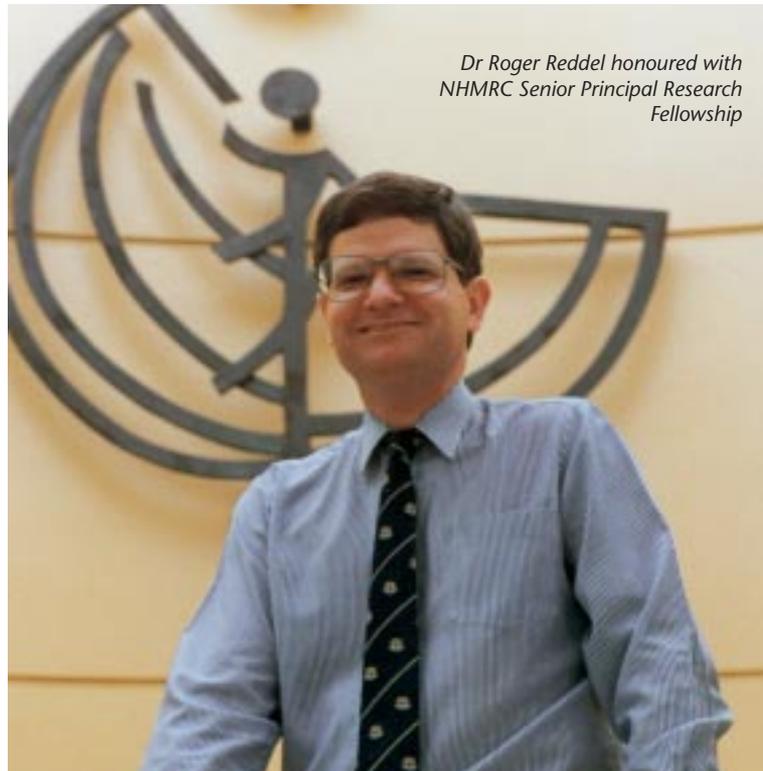
"It is a great honour to enter the NHMRC fellowship scheme at this level and I'm delighted that CMRI's Cancer Research Unit has received this national recognition," said Dr Reddel.

Dr Reddel's appointment brings to three, the number of senior scientists at CMRI who are funded by the NHMRC at the top rung. This is an unprecedented situation for an Australian research institute. Dr Patrick Tam, Head of the Embryology Unit, has been at this level for some time and Dr Phil Robinson was awarded the SPRF last year. The Fellowships are awarded on a competitive basis with well over 100 applicants from all fields of medical research throughout Australia. Only three new SPRFs were awarded this year.

"I am extremely grateful to Cancer Council NSW who have supported my work continuously over the past 15 years and have been funding me at the SPRF level for the past five years," said Dr Reddel. "This support as well as the ongoing support of the Judith Hyam Memorial Trust Fund for Cancer Research, the Allan Research Trust and all CMRI supporters has been critically important to the progress of our research and has underpinned this successful application to the NHMRC."

In recommending the funding, the NHMRC's national advisory panel of top medical researchers commended Dr Reddel for his commitment and dedication and his "outstanding ability" to work in both the laboratory and clinical spheres. They described his laboratory's

discovery of the Alternative Lengthening of Telomeres mechanism that allows some cancer cells to continue dividing unchecked as a "watershed finding". This is a high honour indeed in the extremely competitive field of cancer research that sees a steady stream of significant steps being made worldwide towards a full understanding of cancer and its effective treatment.



*Dr Roger Reddel honoured with NHMRC Senior Principal Research Fellowship*

## **NHMRC** grants for **brain** and **brawn**

Dr Phil Robinson, Head of the Cell Signalling Unit, has also been awarded two NHMRC Project Grants in the latest round of Federal funding for medical research. One grant supports a small team looking at Septin-3, a gene discovered in the laboratory, to investigate its exact role at the nerve ending – a role that they believe will prove to be crucial for healthy brain function. The other is a joint grant held with Dr Basil Roufogalis at the University of Sydney. The collaborative team will continue their investigations into the role that RalA may play in translating the stress signals received by neurons following, for example, a lack of oxygen or stroke, into the damage seen in the brain following such injuries.

Dr Edna Hardeman, Head of the Muscle Development Unit, is co-investigator on an NHMRC Project Grant awarded to her colleague, Dr Kathryn North at the Children's Hospital at Westmead through the University of Sydney. Together with their colleagues Drs North and Hardeman will investigate the influence of a particular set of muscle genes on human physical performance. Dr North's previous work had suggested that a gene called alpha-actinin-3, can influence whether an athlete will excel at sprint sports. Together they will investigate how the gene affects muscle fibre type in the body by testing its effects in mice and in human cells grown in the laboratory dish. "The project will also examine whether this gene affects the severity of muscle disease in patients caused by mutations in other muscle genes," says Dr Hardeman.

Government funding of CMRI researchers, as well as being an indicator of their quality and standing in the Australian medical research community, is vital for maximising the Institute's capacity for research that is primarily driven by donated funds. Grants and donated funds raised by CMRI supporters work together to ensure that additional research staff and equipment are available to get the research done faster, more efficiently and to achieve the best possible results in terms of the discoveries that will benefit the health of children in the future.



Paul Sironen of Krispy Kreme Doughnuts with Jeans for Genes National Campaign Manager Julijana Trifunovic.



Year round support from Genie John Poupart selling CMRI Christmas cards at Blacktown. Seen here with Kelly Morgan from Jeans for Genes.



Jeans for Genes artists with their 'Genie-rosity' Awards. Left to right: Ernie Gerzabek, Melissa Beowulf, Carolyn McKay-Creecy, Hugh Oliviero and Nafisa Naomi.

## Your **Genie-rosity** knows no bounds

With 2003 nearly over and so far \$3.8 million counted, the Jeans for Genes team are excited and hopeful that our target of \$4 million will be achieved. This is better than at the same time in any previous year, so you certainly did make our 10th Birthday year an extra special one. We are still waiting on some businesses, genies and schools to send in their money raised, so if you still haven't sent yours in, please do, and help us hit that target.

And thankyou to all those who wrote to us with their ideas and comments for making Jeans for Genes bigger and better next year. Your support and interest is very important to Jeans for Genes and CMRI.

### Continued Thanks

Special thanks to Mary Johnson from the Olympic Hotel in Preston, Melbourne, for her wonderful support over the years. Mary visited CMRI for the first time and presented us with a cheque for \$10,000. A new supporter this year was Krispy Kreme Doughnuts in Penrith, NSW. The company's Fundraising Manager, Football legend Paul Sironen, also visited the Institute with a very welcome cheque. And all credit is due to Genies Megan Smith and friends who raised \$8500 in the small NSW community of Wellington.

In October, CMRI held a special 'Genie-rosity' Awards ceremony to thank major supporters and give them the opportunity to see the research in action. Among those visiting were some of the generous artists who have donated their time over the years to decorate our celebrity jeans, representatives of our major retailers, and long-term supporters such as Feehan Communications, Burwood Press and Patsy Cadell.

Special thanks must also go to all the schools that support us every year. This year the school that raised the most funds per student will win a Packard Bell Computer kindly donated by NEC. The winning school will be announced in December.

### Jeans will be the law in 2004

Planning has already begun for next year – don't forget the date, August 6 2004. The theme for our celebrity jeans Art Auction is Music LEGends and we have already received personally signed jeans from stars such as Dolly Parton, Burt Bacharach, Barry Manilow and Tina Arena. The Auction will take place in Sydney in July. If you would like to receive an invitation please contact Kelly on 02 9687 2800.

We have secured an Australian Music LEGend for our \$10 pin, which we are extremely excited about, but for now we have decided to keep it under wraps until the next issue of Under the Microscope.

Jeans for Genes always welcomes new official retail outlets and sponsors for events. So if you would like to get further involved in one of Australia's biggest charity events for 2004, please contact National Campaign Manager, Julijana Trifunovic on 02 9687 2800.

## Local Heroes

CMRI researchers have received accolades from their fellow scientists in their local area of western Sydney, winning four research presentation awards at the Westmead Association Hospital Week Research Symposium held on 22 August.

The Symposium allows scientists, doctors and nurses in the Westmead Research Hub (which consists of CMRI, the Westmead Millennium Institute, Westmead Hospital and the Children's Hospital at Westmead) to showcase their research and promote sharing of local expertise and facilities.

Dr Lorel Colgin from CMRI's Cancer Research Unit was co-winner of the prize for Best Oral Presentation for her lecture on her recent findings on a protein called POT1 and its role in cancer (see August 2003 issue – [www.cmri.com.au](http://www.cmri.com.au)). She shared the \$1500 prize with Megan Steain from the Westmead Millennium Institute.

Many scientists also presented recent results in the form of posters. Of the four Best Poster prizes awarded, three came to CMRI scientists. PhD student Adam Brymora of the Cell Signalling Unit described the first identification of the protein ERp57 as a controller of the function of RalA, which has an essential role in secretion from neurons.

Dr Stephen Palmer of the Muscle Development Unit presented results from the team studying MusTRD, a gene implicated in determining whether muscle cells become 'fast' or 'slow' twitch. An imbalance of fibre types is a characteristic part of many human muscle diseases. The team showed that in mice, abnormally high levels of MusTRD lead to an absence of 'slow' muscle fibres with associated abnormal curvature of the spine and limb weakness.

Afroditi Spinoulas described work that she has done with Dr Jane Fleming in the joint CMRI-Children's Hospital at Westmead Gene Therapy Research Unit. In Friedreich's ataxia, a gene defect causes neurons in the periphery of the body to die, causing progressive loss of sensation and paralysis. Using modified viruses they delivered a healthy copy of the gene to patients' cells growing in laboratory dishes, restoring function to most of the cells. Years of work are required before the gene therapy can be tested in patients, but the results are very encouraging.

*Rescued Friedreich's ataxia cells can be seen in the 'O' on the front cover (the orange glow is an indicator that the gene has been successfully delivered). Photograph by Afroditi Spinoulas.*



*Clockwise from far left:*

*Celebrating Kangaroo Valley Committee's 45th birthday, (left to right) ex-president Isobel Butler, founding member Doris Good, CMRI's Jennifer Philps and current President George Howe;*

*Olivier and Renée from Latin Connection Dance Australia demonstrate the Salsa at the Can Can Committee's inaugural event;*

*CMRI staff, friends and supporters join in with "It's amoré" as Tim Bailey makes a live cross to Channel 10 News with Joey Fimano as a prelude to Joey's brilliant concert in aid of CMRI;*

*Maroota Committee daughters Bianca (left) and Cristal Jordan help serve basket lunches at the 'Fiddletown Ridge' open garden day.*

# Committee Power

## **Kangaroo Valley Committee – happy 45th birthday!**

One of the first committees inspired to get together by CMRI founding father, Sir Lorimer Dods, Kangaroo Valley have been around since CMRI first opened its doors. They have matched the scientists' efforts to find better treatments for childhood disease every step of the way with their wonderful fundraising endeavours – Happy Birthday!

## **Adelaide Committee**

150 people had a fine time trawling their minds for trivia at the new Committee's successful first Quiz night. Many thanks to MC Matt Keogh, quiz expert Jinny Keogh, Wendy and Matty, Don Nikou, president of the Macedonian Hall for donating the venue, and the 45 sponsors who came forward with prizes.

## **Thumbelina Committee**

Our sincere apologies to the Thumbelina Committee for a glitch in the report of their 'Taste of France' function in our last newsletter. Many thanks to Ossie Pitts at Travellers World International travel agency for donating the airline tickets and transfers for the raffle prize. Thanks also to The Leading Hotels of the World, The Raphael Hotel in Paris, The Majestic Hotel, Pavilion on the Park, Bollinger, Grand Marnier, Cointreau, L'Oreal, Lancombe, Martin Place Florist, Herbies, Gabriel Gaté, Christoffle Paris of Double Bay and Le Boulevard French Restaurant in Avalon. Plus, a huge thankyou to Westfield Chatswood and Northbridge Plaza for allowing the Committee to sell raffle tickets in their shopping centres. With all this wonderful support they raised just over \$14,000.

## **'Circular Keys Chorus'**

Australia's Sweet Adelines Small Chorus Champions provided an entertaining evening at Parramatta Riverside Theatre with CMRI as the beneficiaries. Thankyou to everyone.

## **Maroota Committee**

Catering par excellence by our Maroota Committee at 'Fiddletown Ridge', Arcadia, provided a welcome rest for those attending the open garden day.

## **Gerrington Committee**

Even the Committee managed to enjoy themselves while still providing a top-notch luncheon for nearly 250 guests at Gerrington Town Hall. Barbara Holborow proved to be a fascinating guest speaker with her tales from the family courts and her vision for reform.

## **Northern Beaches Committee**

Pat McDermott, raconteur extraordinaire had the capacity luncheon audience in stitches with her topical, amusing recollections of being a rugby mum!

## **Can Can Committee**

It was all shimmy and shake at the new Committee's inaugural "Funtastic" Salsa evening. Congratulations to Anna Weaving and her Committee for this successful start.

## **Taree Committee**

Babies, babies and more babies helped raise funds for CMRI at Taree's baby show. With theatre nights and catering being planned for the year, Heather will welcome new committee members.

## **As one door closes...**

Order of the Eastern Star Mascot Chapter No. 17 sadly closed its doors, but in doing so opened a legacy for CMRI with a \$25,000 donation. It is with grateful thanks that we acknowledge this very generous donation from all the past and present members.

## **10 out of 10**

Many thanks to the Lions Club of Oatley who matched 10 years of Jeans for Genes Day with an accumulated donation of \$10,000 from selling badges at local railway stations.



## **Dates for your Diary**

### **Allan Research Trust**

'Love is in the Air' Valentine's Day dinner dance and auction. Enjoy glitz, glamour, good food and wine at the fully-restored Granville Town Hall (the setting for Strictly Ballroom) on 14 February 2004. Tickets \$100. For details call Janys on 02 9871 1321

### **Strathfield Committee**

Dinner with special guest speaker, renowned international journalist Jonathon Harley (son of Dr John Harley, former Director of CMRI). Concord Golf Club, 26 March, 7pm. Tickets \$75. For details call Jennifer on 02 9687 2800

