



# Benchpress

The official newsletter of the  
Australian Institute of Medical Scientists (Victorian Branch)  
A.C.N 010 985 403

March 2018 Edition

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Dear Colleagues,

Your **Victorian Branch Committee** is off to a flying start for 2018!

Already we have events in the pipeline for this year and possibly next year!

Firstly, elections for the **Victorian Branch Committee** in October 2017 saw **Dr David Hawke** join us. David is a very keen cytologist from **Victorian Cytology Services** and has worked in a range of areas of virology including holding post-doctoral fellow positions at the **University of Melbourne**, the **Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Medical Research** and as a visiting fellow at the **University of Bristol, UK**. He has published extensively, including in peer-reviewed scientific journals such as the **Medical Journal of Australia**, **Vaccine** and **Nature**. His current focus is the transition to an HPV-based cervical screening program, and he has been an active member on several advisory committee covering the implementation and safety of the new **National Cervical Screening Program**. In his spare time he is a passionate advocate for vaccination. David will be a valuable contributor to the Victorian AIMS Committee. Welcome!

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to **Leah Smeaton**, our new Benchpress Editor. Leah is a student at **RMIT University** and has taken on the role of getting the Branch Newsletter together. This is a very big task and I would like you all to get to know her. Welcome, Leah!

Also on the night we awarded some prizes to the best RMIT students in 2016. See page 7 for photos of some of the prize recipients on the night. Congratulations to all student awardees!

2017 was a very busy year for the AIMS Victorian Branch because we held not one, but two, educational events for members. The first event was in June – the first of our highly successful **Morphology Workshops** which sold out before you could say, “What’s that cell?”

The exciting news is that we are going to have a repeat act in May. The **Morphology Committee** plans to hold this event on the weekend of 19-20 May, so tell all your colleagues who missed out last year to book early to avoid repeat disappointment!



The second event for the year was our **'Science in the Spotlight' Scientific Meeting in Marysville** on the weekend of November 18-19—also highly successful and enjoyed by all.

We had a very distinguished line-up including **Denese Marks** from the **Red Cross Blood Bank**, **Robyn Coleman**, the **2017 Travelling AIMS Orator**, and **Dr David Barton**, who gave a very moving presentation about the human impacts of Marysville's devastating 2009 bushfires. David lives in Marysville and was there the day the bushfires burnt the town to the ground. He is now studying for his PhD on the effects of trauma on survivors and was able to share with us some of the tolls these infernos have on people's lives.

**Jaelyne Birrell** has written a very eloquent summary of our weekend at Marysville on page **5** and it is accompanied by some fine photos taken of the event by our photographer for the weekend, B.K.

I would like to thank all the organisers of both these events. Many hours of effort into making them run smoothly, enjoyably and at a really high educational standard.

Your Committee is planning another event around July, so watch this space for more information as it unfolds.

Now, your newsletter needs **YOU!** We would love to see small snippets about interesting happenings, scientific facts and figures and achievements in the newsletter. Even write ups of interesting meetings that you have attended! So make this newsletter more interesting to read and help us connect with everyone through **your** professional body.

Looking forward to hearing from you and seeing you at our next educational event. Have a happy 2018!

**Kerryn Weekes**

**Chair AIMS Victorian Branch**



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE  
OF MEDICAL SCIENTISTS

## Morphology Workshop **RERUN**

- Beginner Level:** Sat May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017 - 09:00 (*sharp*) to 17:00
- Intermediate Level:** Sun May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017 - 09:00 (*sharp*) to 17:00
- Venue:** ***Melbourne Pathology,***  
***103, Victoria Parade.***
- Costs:** AIMS Member \$100  
Non AIMS Member \$120  
Student AIMS \$50  
Student Non AIMS \$75

**NOTE: this workshop is EXACTLY the same as the one run last year.**

These workshops are being run under the auspices of the AIMS Victorian Branch. The Workshops are directed at developing Beginner and Intermediate level morphology skills. The workshops are being run over a weekend and are geared towards scientists or students wanting to improve their morphology skills. The sessions are a full days and conducted at the training facility at Melbourne Pathology. Each participant will have access to a microscope.

The workshop will be conducted within groups with group leaders running each group.

**Any Queries? Please contact: [cindy.omalley@rmit.edu.au](mailto:cindy.omalley@rmit.edu.au)**

***Place numbers are strictly limited***

Registration is via the AIMS website: [www.aims.org.au](http://www.aims.org.au)



March 2018

The Australian Society  
for **Microbiology**   
bringing Microbiologists together

## Victorian Clinical Serology and Molecular Special Interest Group Meeting

### Program

- ***Mycoplasma genitalium* – an unwelcome gift**  
Dr James Stewart  
Microbiology registrar  
Monash Pathology
- **The Molecular Revolution in GI Diagnostic Testing.**  
Michelle Francis  
Senior Scientist, Molecular Microbiology  
Monash Pathology
- TBA

**Date:** Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2018

**Time:** 6pm light refreshments  
6.30pm presentations

**Where:** St. Vincent's Pathology  
11<sup>th</sup> floor Conference Room  
Building A (Main in-patient building).  
Use lift No. 6 nearest to reception  
41 Victoria Parade

Please RSVP by Monday 26<sup>th</sup> March to Megan Wieringa

[megan.wieringa@monashhealth.org](mailto:megan.wieringa@monashhealth.org)

95944583

**Hope you can make it!**



## Science in the Spotlight!

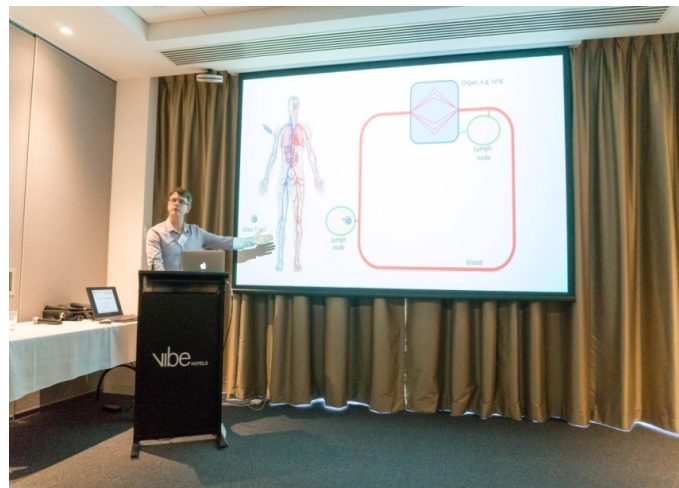


The Australian Institute of Medical Scientists (AIMS) Victorian Branch, *Science in the Spotlight 2017*, was held in the picturesque town of Marysville on November 18-19 at the Vibe Conference Centre. The biannual scientific conference was held jointly with the Australian Society for Microbiology with the aim to bring a cross discipline programme for the medical and microbiology sciences and facilitate networking opportunities.

During the two day conference delegates were treated to an outstanding array of presentations in haematology, coagulation, transfusion medicine, immunology, biochemistry, microbiology, molecular and research.

The conference opened with a fantastic presentation by Professor William Heath (University of Melbourne, The Doherty Institute) on understanding immunity to malaria in order to develop vaccines for the infectious disease transmitted by mosquitoes.

This was followed by an equally interesting presentation by Michelle Francis on current and upcoming technologies to diagnose causative agent of infectious diarrhoea with the take home message that users must be aware of the limitations of these technologies.



Feature speaker Dr David Barton (RMIT University) presented a personal account of the Black Saturday bushfires that devastated Marysville in 2009 together with his PhD research "*Disaster in relation to attachment, loss, grief and recovery – the Marysville experience*". It was a highly moving presentation that left the audience teary eyed.

Keynote speaker Associate Professor Denese Marks (Australian Red Cross Blood Service, NSW) closed the day with a talk on "*how you like your platelets: warm, cold or frozen?*" It provided an insight into how the transfusion medicine community is exploring ways to prolong the life of platelets donated for transfusion and stop wastage.



AIMS travelling orator Robyn Coleman (Sullivan Nicolaides Pathology, QLD) opened the second conference day with a presentation on “*coagulation considerations in the patient with burns*”. Robyn’s comprehensive talk covered instrumentation, testing to interpretation with difficult concepts simplified with amusing laboratory stories.

Dr Sridurga Mehtraprabhu (Alfred Health) provided a very in-depth insight on the use of circulating cell-free tumour DNA testing for non invasive monitoring in patients with multiple myeloma.

Dr Norelle Sherry (Austin Health, Melbourne Genomics Health Alliance) presented on the advances and set backs of whole genome sequencing in the clinical setting. Her chocolates bars slide was memorable.



Professor Bayden Wood (Monash University) ended the afternoon session with an eye opening new infrared spectroscopic point of care device for the detection and quantification of pathogens in blood. The device has recently been used in Papua New Guinea and Laos in field trials for malaria diagnosis.

Delegates were surprised with a Hawaiian theme dinner complete with leis and grass skirts. And local musician Ben Mitchell entertained delegates with his original works. The poster prize was awarded on the night to delegate Jeremy Wells (Monash Health) for his poster “*severe haemophilia A caused by a duplication in the factor VIII gene covering exons 7 to 9.*”

The feedback from delegates, speakers and sponsors was overwhelming positive. For more details of what went down check out the VIC AIMS/ASM 2017 Conference Video at [aims.org.au](http://aims.org.au) website.





## The Victorian Branch AGM

The 2017 Victorian Branch AGM was held at the Alfred Hospital following a very interesting and educational Haematology Discussion Group Meeting. There were a number of prizes awarded on the night. Two were presented to AIMS members and six RMIT Laboratory Medicine students received awards for best students in 2016.

The student awards were presented by both the **Victorian Branch Chair, Kerryn Weekes** and the **Haematology Unit Leader of the School of Health and Biomedical Sciences, RMIT University, Professor Denise Jackson**. **Professor Jackson** acknowledged all the student's hard work and told the audience that the awards were well deserved.

The AIMS Victorian Branch Awards for excellence in Laboratory Medicine at RMIT were awarded to:

Best Haematology Graduate:	Parveen Singh
Best Transfusion & Transplantation Graduate:	Amanda Hong
Best Histo and Cyto Graduate:	Imogen Campbell
Best Microbiology Graduate:	Sonia Rainbow
Prize for Professional Practice:	Kartika Henry
Prize for Research Project:	Jehad Abdulazziz K Alzahrani

Kartika and Jehad were unfortunately not able to be present for the awards.

**AIMS Victorian Branch Awards** are awarded to medical scientists for their achievements on an annual basis. There were two award offered in 2017.

**Lidia Rosa** received the **George Milsom Memorial Award**. This award is offered to a Victorian AIMS member for significant achievement or service in the field of Medical Laboratory Science in Victoria. Lidia is currently the Principal Scientist in Haematology at the Royal Children's Hospital and has worked in several Melbourne hospitals as well as hospitals in Italy. She has been involved

with a number of research projects, clinical studies and contributed to the development and establishment of new diagnostic and flow cytometry services for leukaemia patients during her time in Italy. She is currently a NATA assessor, member of the Statewide Pathology Laboratory Working Group and guest lecturer on Paediatric Haematology at RMIT.

**Kevin Ericksen** received the **George Swanson Christie Memorial Award**. This award is nominated & offered by the Victorian Branch committee. It has been presented annually since 2004 & is offered to an inspirational medical scientist who has shown ongoing excellence in the field. Kevin has held the position of Director of Monash Pathology since 2007. He has served as President of AIMS for two terms and has been Chair of the AIMS National Board of Management and well as Chairman of the Planning and Finance committee. He has also been active as a representative of the DHS, NPAAC, NATA Medical Testing Accreditation Advisory Committee and the Pathology Services Table Committee. He has also been Vice Chair of the RMIT Committee of Review for the future structure and direction of the B.AppSc course in Medical Laboratory Science.

Some more highlights from the evening on the next page:



**Lidia and Kevin at the Vic Branch Awards**



## Award winners at the Vic Branch AGM



**Kevin Ericksen**



**Imogen Campbell**



**Parveen Singh**



**Lidia de Rosa**



**Amanda Hong**



**Sonia Rainbow**



## The Science and Ethics of Genome Editing

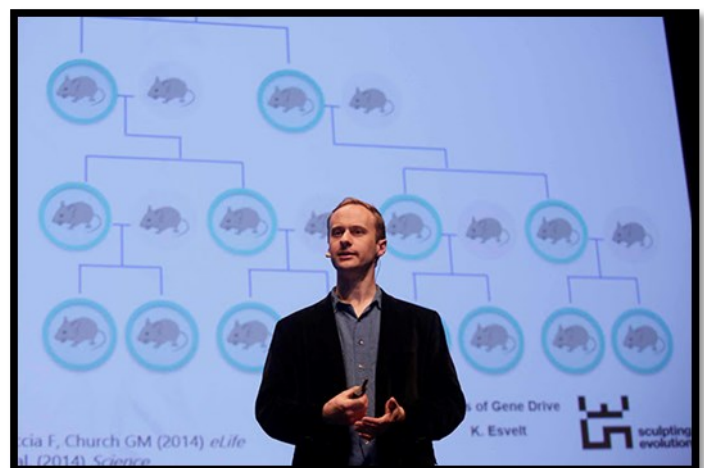
In February **Convergence Science** held a thought provoking, awe inspiring, public seminar at the Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre. Our laboratory attended because we were curious about the use of the new gene editing technology that is a game changer for many researchers. The use of **CRISPER** and **Cas9** technologies has changed the way we look at genetic engineering forever. Gone is the old way of transplantation using gene therapy by lentiviral vectors. This new technology has stopped many researchers in their tracks and they are literally restarting their research again from scratch.

Of course, along with new technologies comes a new set of ethical and moral problems that we all will have to engage with because of gene editing's far-reaching effects. It can be used to make any conceivable change to the genome of every living organism—from editing viruses and bacteria to improving plants and changing our genetic makeup to eliminate human genetic diseases. Gene editing can be performed in somatic, germline and embryonic cells. The implications are mind-boggling and we were almost overwhelmed by the list of possibilities for this new technology.



Over 1,700 people turned out to hear **Professor Jennifer Doudna** from the University of California Berkeley give a brief history of **CRISPER-Cas9 technology**. She also outlined different applications and ethical questions surrounding the use of this technology.

**Assistant Professor Kevin** of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology called for greater transparency in research including registration all applications of this technology's use, so the scientific community can reliably keep track of any and all developments. He also introduced the audience to other new technologies that will enable edited genomes to spread more easily and quickly (or more slowly if necessary) in populations. These were called **gene drives** and **daisy drives**, totally new concepts to most of us.



of



By this stage fear of the unknown was starting to permeate the audience until **Prof Alan Trounson** (Pioneer IVF scientist and stem cell researcher), who was also present, asked the final question for the evening: “If it is so easy to do—can anything bad be reversed or overwritten?” The answer was a considered “Yes!” as they think they have found ways to bring populations back to their normal state if the introduced changes had a detrimental effect. I think many audience participants were very relieved to hear of this development.



This seminar was fascinating and if you want to hear what Prof Doudna and A/Prof Esvelt had to say about how this technology works, its applications in science, how easy it is to use and the ethical and moral dilemmas it has provoked, go to:

[http://www.convergencesciencenetwork.org.au/convergence-science-forum---archive.html?mc\\_cid=72331ab222&mc\\_eid=b611245dda](http://www.convergencesciencenetwork.org.au/convergence-science-forum---archive.html?mc_cid=72331ab222&mc_eid=b611245dda)

**Kerryn Weekes**

**AIMS Branch Chair**



## **RMIT Orientation Day- Hanging Rock**

Every year RMIT welcomes a new cohort of eager and excited students onto its campus, enrolled in various courses that they have chosen. Whilst this is an exciting new adventure for the new students, the daunting task of navigating university and making new friends has the potential to cause anxiety and trepidation. To remedy this, RMIT runs an orientation day at Hanging Rock, to encourage the formation of new friendship groups and to facilitate getting to know coordinators and lecturers. The students work together in small groups to perform orienteering tasks and explore the surrounding area, this promotes teamwork and it is here that the majority of new friendship groups are formed. Nothing quite encourages students to have fun and relax together than spending a day outdoors, hiking through nature and a bit of friendly competition.

Personally, 3 years later, I still have the same friendship group that I formed at Hanging Rock and whilst it's substantially larger, those 6 people I started with have been a continual support and we have grown together through the challenges and successes experienced at university.

Every orientation at Hanging Rock provides a fun and safe environment for students and always ensures a great start to the university year.

**Leah Smeaton**

**AIMS Vic Branch Student Member**



## Discussion Group Convenors

### Clinical Flow Cytometry Users Group (CFUG)

Peter Gambell

email: [peter.gambell@petermac.org](mailto:peter.gambell@petermac.org)

### Haematology (HDG)

Steve Schischka

email: : [Steven.Schischka@svhm.org.au](mailto:Steven.Schischka@svhm.org.au)

### Histology (HGV)

Adrian Warmington

email: [adrian.warmington@sjog.org.au](mailto:adrian.warmington@sjog.org.au)

### Immunohaematology (VIDG)

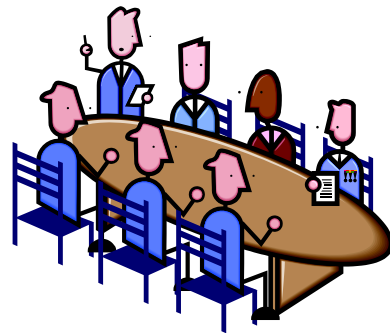
Helen Bardsley

email: [Helen.Bardsley@austin.org.au](mailto:Helen.Bardsley@austin.org.au)

### Immunology (DIDG)

Marilyn Clark

email: [Marilyn.Clark@rch.org.au](mailto:Marilyn.Clark@rch.org.au)



*Anybody requiring information concerning these discussion groups should contact the relevant person listed above*



## Upcoming Events 2018

Morphology Workshop 19-20th May 2018

AIMS/AACB Combined NSM 2018 3-5 September 2018

## Next 2018 Deadline for Benchpress

10 May 2018

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