



# **ASMR'S DIAMOND JUBILEE**

**60 YEARS OF PUBLIC, POLITICAL AND SCIENTIFIC ADVOCACY**

## President's report

2021 sees the 60th anniversary of the inaugural ASMR Board meeting on August 9 and I am extremely proud to be leading the Society into its Diamond Jubilee year. The ASMR has provided steadfast advocacy for the health and medical research sector over its 60 years and will continue to do so into the future. One of the greatest aspects of the ASMR is its people, from the members and affiliates, to the many Directors, past-Presidents, life members and staff. We were therefore thrilled to hear that our long-serving Executive Officer, Ms Cath West OAM, was recognised for her contributions and dedication to the sector with a Medal of the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honours list.

### Advocacy

With the recent release of the 2021 Intergenerational Report it was indicated that over the next 40 years the population at large will continue to increase in age, the economy will grow at a slower rate, and health and aged care will be the fastest growing areas of Government spending. This combined with worsening health issues overshadowed or unaddressed during the current pandemic, foreboding of more pandemics and the inevitable

impacts from climate change, mean we need a Government that is committed to making bold efforts to better support Universities, Medical Research Institutes and the researchers within them, in order to generate service efficiencies, technological innovations and health outcomes that will protect the nation. Unfortunately, the Federal budget had little to offer the sector over and above what was already allocated, but with a Federal election expected in the next year, there is a critical need to advocate for a commitment from both sides of politics to increase and sustain support of our sector.

With the MRFF now fully capitalised and disbursing at its intended maximum, the investment into discovery research through the NHMRC that has been stagnant for over a decade is in dire need of a considerable investment increase to drive the progression of Australian health and medical research, support expansion of workforce and sector capacity and feed the aspirations and potential of the MRFF. That said, we await the imminent release of the Australian National Audit Office's report on Health's Management of the MRFF, as the ASMR has long advocated for established and transparent processes and governance to be legislated.

The ASMR continues to engage with politicians and other organisations in the sector to advocate for increased and adequate support of research and researchers, with fair and adequate research opportunity to support our mission of empowering research for a healthy and equitable Australia.



Dr Ryan Davis

### Activities

ASMR Medical Research Week® in 2021 was cautious in its execution with the very real threat of lockdowns and border closures at any given time. Scientific symposia were held online and the ASMR Medalist tour was restricted to live audiences at the National Press Club and Sydney Gala dinner with livestreaming to Western Australia, Queensland, Newcastle and South Australian Gala events. Nevertheless, the 2021 ASMR Medalist, Professor Kelvin Kong, delivered measured and engaging presentations that were greatly received. He was awarded the medal because his

### In this issue:

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>President's report</b>  | <b>  2</b>  |
| <b>ASMR — Forging the Future for Health and Medical Research in Australasia</b>          | <b>  3</b>  |
| <b>ASMR Past Presidents — Perspectives on ASMR and Medical Research</b>                  | <b>  4</b>  |
| <b>60th Anniversary of ASMR — my personal thoughts and experiences as an ASMR member</b> | <b>  6</b>  |
| <b>Not just a job — Cath West, OAM</b>   | <b>  7</b>  |
| <b>ASMR Medical Research Week® 2021</b>  | <b>  9</b>  |
| <b>'Hearing versus Listening' ASMR Medalist 2021: Professor Kelvin Kong</b>              | <b>  10</b> |
| <b>60th ASMR National Scientific Conference Inspiration to Implementation</b>            | <b>  11</b> |

work encompasses so many facets of the research pipeline, he has lived experience and a drive to provide health equity for ear disease across Australia, has a strong sense of social justice and advocacy and embodies many of the personal and professional qualities that are important for driving change to ensure better health outcomes for all Australians. Unfortunately, Victoria were in the midst of a lockdown and were unable to join the proceedings, but there are plans to hold the event in the coming months. I would like to congratulate all the State and regional committees who organised and executed events across the country and thank them for their contributions to the society.

We now look forward to our 60th ASMR National Scientific Conference, which despite our best

intentions will be held virtually in late November. The theme of this year's conference is Inspiration to Implementation, examining the entire research pipeline from discovery to translation, commercialisation, prevention and implementation. This year's Firkin orator will be New Zealand neonatologist Dame Professor Jane Harding who pioneered the clinical management of neonatal low blood glucose and the Edwards orator will be organic chemist Professor David Craik who discovered cyclotides and has developed these into an extremely successful drug and toxin development program. There will also be a raft of excellent plenary speakers, talks selected from abstracts, the Peter Doherty Leading Light award, Champion Ma Playoust award, oral and poster awards, along with

professional development sessions and a discussion panel on positioning research for impact, quality and consumer engagement. Please save the date, submit your abstracts and join us in November as it promises to be an engaging conference that will bring together researchers from across the sector at a time when we all need to stick together.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that Associate Professor Tony Kenna is the President-elect and will take over in late November. I commend Tony for taking on this very important role and look forward to working with him to ensure a seamless transition into his Presidency.

**Dr Ryan Davis, President,**  
**Australian Society for Medical Research**

### Benefits of being an ASMR member

- Stay in Touch with the Latest Sector Developments
- Fast Track your Career with CPD events
- Networking Opportunities
- Advocacy for Health and Medical Research
- Support for Students and Early Career Researchers

<https://asmr.org.au/membership/becoming-a-member/benefits/>

# ASMR — Forging the Future for Health and Medical Research in Australasia

## Diamond Jubilee Year

Celebrating ASMR's long and proud history of public, political and scientific advocacy beginning with that first meeting of founding directors back on August 9, 1961 at Barry Firkin's home in Double Bay. The first ASMR Committee consisted of Barry Firkin (our first financial member) President, Gordon Archer President-elect, and Alan Skyring Secretary/Treasurer; Arnold Hunt, James McRae and Rodney Shearman were co-directors. These visionary young scientists stamped the society with the highest ideals and aspirations. The first annual scientific meeting (National Scientific Conference) was held in 1961 with 66 members attending.

The Annual Scientific Meeting has been held every year since 1961.

- ASMR forged a central, unified lobbying approach for medical research funding.
- The Royal Australasian College of Physicians housed the ASMR office from 1976 to 2012 ...*RENT FREE.*
- Our annual flagship event, ASMR Medical Research Week®, started in 1981.
- The ASMR Ladies Committee was established in the early years in NSW. The committee ceased its activities in 1971. Victoria also had a Ladies Committee in 1968.

- Judith Whitworth was the first female President of ASMR in 1984.
- The ASMR Research Fund was established by ASMR in 1990 with the sole purpose of providing research awards to ASMR members, in particular early career members.
- Election year 1993 saw the three major parties agreeing to lift funding to at least 2% of the total health budget by the year 2000.
- **1997** — President Kieran Scott invited inaugural ASMR Medalist, Professor Peter Doherty, to tour the country during ASMR Medical Research Week®.



**Barry Firkin,**  
**Founding director**  
**and the first ASMR President — 1961**

- **1999** — ASMR commissioned a workplace survey to identify areas of concern for Australian biomedical researchers.
- **1998** — President Steve Wesseling proposed a 'FASEB' style meeting bringing together many organisations to highlight health and medical research in Australia.
- **2000** — ASMR played a pivotal role in the Wills Review and led the successful campaign to double NHMRC Funding.
- **2002** — President Peter Schofield coined the phrase, "Public, Political and Scientific Advocacy".
- **2003–2008** — ASMR commissioned Access Economics Reports I and II "Exceptional Returns: The Value of Investing in Health R&D in Australia".
- **2005** — President Bronwyn Kingwell convened the first Australian Health and Medical Research Congress.
- **2006** — Our groundbreaking Deloitte Access Economics Report "Exceptional Returns" and intense lobbying led to doubling of the NHMRC Budget.
- **2007** — President Maria Kavallaris conducted the Sustainable Funding Forum.
- **2008** — ASMR Workforce Survey: "Perceptions of Health and Medical Research Careers: The ASMR Workforce Survey".
- **2009** — "Planning the Health and Medical Research Workforce 2010–2019", Case Studies Series I, II and III.
- **2010–2019** — Online Mentor Program.
- **2010** — "Framework for the future — An Asia Pacific Health and Medical Research Funding Union".
- **2012** — ASMR led Health and Medical Research Sector Submission to the McKeon Strategic Review of Health and Medical Research in Australia.
- **2012** — Celebrated Australian health and medical research at the 6th Australian Health and Medical Research Congress (AHMRC) which was held in Adelaide.
- **2014** — Submission to the House of Representatives: Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, Inquiry into the harmful use of alcohol in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- **2014** — The ASMR commissioned Deloitte Access Economics to undertake a comprehensive report extrapolating the health and economic returns that could be generated by the MRFF.
- **2015** — Inquiry into the MRFF Bill submitted to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee.
- **2016** — ARC Engagement-Impact Submission.
- **2016** — NHMRC Structural Review Submission.
- **2017** — Major restructure of the long-standing grants program of the NHMRC and the first disbursements from the long-awaited MRFF.
- **2017** — Launched the new ASMR Peter Doherty Leading Light Award, which recognises an outstanding research contribution by a mid-career member (5 to 12 years post-doc) in the last 5 years. The inaugural award was presented at the 2017 ASMR National Scientific Conference by Professor Doherty.
- **2020** — Submission to the senate inquiry for the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill.
- **2021** — Submission on the Mitochondrial Donation Law Reform (Maeve's Law) Bill.

“ Many things have changed since 1961 when the society was first formed, but there has been one constant — the ASMR has been and always will be the leading voice of the health and medical research sector, representing its members and the sector without fear or favour, and battling for Australia's health and medical researchers.

Dr Roger Yazbek,  
 ASMR President  
 – 2014, 2018 and 2019

## ASMR Past Presidents — Perspectives on ASMR and Medical Research

### Professor Judith Whitworth, ASMR President 1984

1984 was a notable, if not Orwellian, year in Australia. Bob Hawke was Prime Minister, Medicare was introduced, as was the dollar coin, Advance Australia Fair, and the Green and Gold, banks were deregulated and AIDS was taking off. As ever, the society was run smoothly and efficiently by the

peerless Ruth. But the past is another country and things were different. Women were very involved in research but underrepresented in senior positions. I think I was the first female president. Victoria was the research powerhouse and other states, with a few exceptions, languished. One health minister of that

era refused to sign off on the NHMRC grants because most of the money was going to Melbourne. It was explained that he could accept or reject the advice but not change it and eventually he did sign and was subsequently a good friend to medical research. Medical people tended to outnumber the scientists.



Professor Judith Whitworth

As the old saying goes, the medicos know the questions but not the answers, while the scientists know the answers but not the questions. The research emphasis was very medical, and often basic, with less clinical, little public health and no policy research. The

prevailing mantra was let a thousand flowers grow. ASMR was a real community and the powerhouse for lobbying, and we visited every sitting federal member to put the case. Senior people (Coghlan, Chalmers, McCloskey, Funder) were very helpful and

the thrust was funding for NHMRC rather than special pleading for specific institutions. So, much has changed, and much (but not all) of it is for the good.

### **Dr Emma Parkinson-Lawrence, ASMR President 2011, 2019.**

I was elected to the ASMR Board of Directors in 2007, which culminated in the honour of being nominated as the 2011 ASMR President in the Society's 50th year. During my Presidency, health and medical research was truly in the national spotlight with the rumoured federal government funding cuts to the NHMRC budget. ASMR maintained its integrity by pursuing a measured approach to government. Indeed, ASMR's bipartisan approach to lobbying for the health and medical research sector underpins ASMR as

the most respected society in health and medical research. Strategically, we were able to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders including Research Australia, Australian Health and Hospitals Association, Business Council of Australia and the Australian Consumers Health Forum, supporting the maintenance of government investment into NHMRC in the 2011 Federal Budget. It is my belief that this document broadened the narrative in support of investment into the sector and was a pivotal element in our success. An invitation

for ASMR to take part in defining the Terms of Reference for the McKeon strategic review by the Honourable Mark Butler MP, then Minister for Mental Health and Ageing for meetings also showed the commitment of ASMR to gathering strategic, evidence-based data to support the case for sustained investment in health and medical research. Moving into its 60th year this commitment and strength continues to support our amazing health and medical research workforce – United We Must Stand!



Dr Emma Parkinson-Lawrence

### **Dr Roger Yazbek, ASMR President 2014, 2018, 2019**

Over the course of its 60 year history, the ASMR has cemented itself as the peak professional body for health and medical research. In the early 1970s, the society broke new ground, reporting the first hard data on the economic return of health and medical research. Since that time, the ASMR has commissioned seven independent reports from Deloitte Access Economics that comprehensively quantify and model the societal impact of Australian medical research. These reports have been crucial in convincing politicians why health and medical research is such a valuable investment for the country.

I first joined the ASMR board at the end of 2009. For me, it was an opportunity to give something back to the health and medical research sector. It was a chance to advocate for an inspiring, passionate, and resilient workforce, that works incredibly hard

to improve the health and lives of those in Australia and around the world. I served three terms as ASMR President, 2014 and 2018-19. Whether it was preparing submissions to government inquiries, presenting the annual ASMR pre-budget submission, meeting with government ministers, gathering data on the workforce, touring the country with the ASMR Medallist, or liaising with senior stakeholders; each year presented its own unique challenges and opportunities. But I can say without hesitation, they were the amongst the most rewarding and proudest moments of my career.

The Society has always been, and must continue to be, courageous, visionary, tenacious and committed to integrity in its pursuit of *empowering research for health and well-being*, towards a vision of a *healthy and equitable Australia*. There are some

who would say that ASMR has “lost its relevance” or that it should “focus on professional development for EMCRs”, but the ASMRs track-record speaks for itself.

We are at a critical period in Australian health and medical research. We are seeing, in real time, how Australian scientists are responding to (and defeating) a global pandemic. However, the NHMRC has seen no meaningful increase for over a decade, and overall funding for medical research is low when compared to other OECD countries. The ASMR will always stand tall, and continue to advocate to our political leaders to support and uphold the integrity, independence and transparency of Australian science. But the ASMR is only as strong as its members. As one, we can create the environment for positive change for a *healthy and equitable Australia*.



Dr Roger Yazbek

# 60th Anniversary of ASMR — my personal thoughts and experiences as an ASMR member

**Professor Don McManus, Senior Scientist and  
NHMRC Leadership Fellow, QIMR Berghofer  
Medical Research Institute, Brisbane.**

We live in particularly challenging and difficult times and many in the medical research community have been greatly disadvantaged by the global covid-19 pandemic, myself included with my group's field studies on neglected tropical diseases in Asia and Africa greatly affected. Nevertheless, in trying times, it is important to reflect on the past and contemplate the future and, as the vaccine roll-out is increased, we can look forward to returning to something approaching normality, although this may take some time yet given the current waves in the spread of the virus and the resulting setbacks affecting us all. Nevertheless, there is always time to celebrate and, as a long-standing member of ASMR, I am delighted to offer my congratulations to the Society on its 60th Anniversary milestone; a great achievement indeed. I was asked to provide my thoughts in this brief article for the Jubilee edition of the newsletter describing my experiences of being a member of the society, why I have remained a member, and how I have seen the research landscape change over the years.

A major reason why I have supported ASMR over so many years and have retained my membership for such a long time has been the society's undying and

extensive public, political and scientific advocacy on behalf of the Australian health and medical research community. This advocacy has involved representation and evidence-based submissions to the government on many issues critical to supporting and investing in medical research in this country. As a career scientist, who has been fortunate to receive continuous, long term support from the NHMRC, I am extremely grateful to the ASMR for its continued promotional efforts on behalf of the sector to increase research funding to the NHMRC. Indeed, ASMR's advocacy for increased investment in medical research in Australia will now be even more critical given the slowing down or interruption of many projects due to covid-19.

I have been a scientist in Australia for over 30 years and obtaining adequate support has never been easy due to the highly competitive nature of the funding process. However, it does seem that procuring research support has become even more challenging, typified by the considerable drop over the past several years in the number of full-time health and medical research positions resulting in the uncertain job security and prospects for many, particularly early and mid-career researchers. Addressing this key issue will require urgent cross-party support and ASMR's role in achieving a suitable dialogue with the Government and Opposition will be crucial. I look forward to continuing my

involvement with ASMR and again commend the society and its members for all their efforts in the past 60 years that have helped to ensure Australia retains a strong, well-supported, world-class health and medical research sector that we can all be suitably proud of.

Bio: Don McManus heads the Molecular Parasitology Laboratory and is a NHMRC Senior Leadership Fellow/Senior Scientist at QIMR Berghofer. He undertook his PhD at the University of Wales and was research fellow/lecturer at Imperial College before moving to QIMR in 1989. His research goal is the prevention and treatment of Neglected Tropical Diseases caused by parasitic worms which constitute a significant global health problem, with children forming the majority of those at risk. His visionary approach continues to link basic and applied research, and his commitment to international field and laboratory studies with his multi-skilled team has translated into workable, innovative and practical control strategies. His ultimate goal is the global elimination of parasitic worm diseases which are the cause of extensive human suffering. He was recipient of the 2018 Sornchai Looareesuwan Medal "for outstanding achievements in tropical medicine research" and the 2020 NHMRC Peter Doherty Investigator Grant Award for the top ranked application in the Leadership category.



Professor Don McManus

## Professional Development webinar

Title: **Alternative career paths  
post-PhD – panel discussion**

Where: **Zoom**

Date: **August 26th,  
4-5pm AEST**

Panel members include representatives from Pharma, Biotech, Public Sector and not-for-profit sectors who will discuss how they transitioned from academia to diverse roles. The discussion will highlight a variety of career options, how to make the move away from academia, what are the pros and cons of different career paths and what transferrable skills can you bring from academia.

[https://asmr.org.au/  
cpd-and-events-2/cpd-  
events-workshops/](https://asmr.org.au/cpd-and-events-2/cpd-events-workshops/)

# Not just a job — Cath West, OAM

ASMR is thrilled to announce that our long-serving Executive Officer, Cath West, has been awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for Service to the Medical Research Community.

Cath West is an unsung hero of Australian health and medical research. Since 1994, Cath has been the Senior Executive Officer for the Australian Society for Medical Research. During this time, she has supported 27 successive Boards of Directors, and 25 Presidents. Cath has overseen the transformation of the ASMR Executive Office, introducing a level of professionalism and business acumen that has been instrumental in underpinning the success of ASMR's advocacy work for the health and medical research community. Cath has mentored and guided young researchers who joined the ASMR board and who have gone on to become some of Australia's most prominent research leaders. One only needs to refer to the quotes below to realise Cath's tremendous impact.

Behind the scenes, Cath works tirelessly for the society. A sometimes thankless job, during ASMR Medical Research Week® she coordinates seven state committees to ensure the co-ordination of

more than 30 events around the country to help promote health and medical research to the Australian public. From financial management, general governance, promotion and marketing of events, media co-ordination and organising the ASMR Medallist tour, Cath's energy and enthusiasm has always been steadfast.

In the time that I have known Cath West, she has gone above and beyond the call of duty to support the ASMR and the broader health and medical research community. During my time as President of ASMR, it never ceased to amaze me the meetings that Cath was able to secure for me with senior Government ministers, to senior heads of department and other key stake-holders.

Under Cath West's leadership, the ASMR has commissioned seven seminal Deloitte Access Economics reports that shed new light on the health and economic returns of government investment in Australian health and medical research. This data has been critical in supporting successive increases to medical research funding around the country. It is not an exaggeration to say that if it had not been

for Cath's leadership, the advocacy for Australian health and medical research would have been all the poorer for it.

Cath embodies the mission of ASMR, to empower research for a healthy and equitable Australia. It is her strong sense of social conscience that has driven her 27 years with the ASMR. Cath West has never sought any accolades or recognition for her service, and seeks only to ensure that Australia's health and medical researchers are provided the necessary tools to continue to deliver improved health outcomes for humanity.

Personally, I am proud to be able to call Cath my colleague, mentor, confidante and friend. She has been so giving of her time, always encouraging me to go bigger and bolder. The countless hours spent in person and over the phone, strategizing, brainstorming and planning the reform of Australian politics. Congratulations on receiving this honour Cath, you are truly deserving.

**Dr Roger Yazbek,**  
ASMR President – 2014, 2018 and 2019



**Cath West**  
ASMR Executive Office

“Cath West, is like family to me, good family. A mentor, confidante and a woman with superpowers. You gave me the courage to stand up for what I believe and to back myself. Love you Cath.

**Dr Sarah Meachem,**  
ASMR President — 2009 and 2016

“Cath has and remains a 'staunch' supporter of ASMR and incoming Presidents and has always kept us on the 'straight and narrow'. If Cath didn't quite agree with something she would always politely say 'yes', followed by 'how about'.

**Dr Emma Parkinson-Lawrence,**  
ASMR President — 2011

“Cath West truly is the heart of the ASMR. In an organisation where Directors come and go with the passage of time, Cath is the one constant, stabilising force.

I'll always have the deepest respect for Cath's sharp mind and insight into the political sphere, having

spent countless hours on the phone with her discussing and dreaming about how Australia could achieve its tremendous potential, both in health and medical research and beyond. Congratulations Cath on receiving this truly befitting honour.

**Dr Daniel Johnstone,**  
ASMR President — 2017

“Cath has made exceptional contributions to health and medical research advocacy in Australia. Her role is not just a job for her. She has raised the profile of medical research in Australia and mentored and trained more emerging medical researchers in advocacy than I can count, both on the national board and state committees. The OAM is a well-deserved honour for Cath and I am thrilled to see her recognised in this way.

Professor Maria Kavallaris,  
ASMR President — 2007

“Cath is the heart of ASMR, providing strategic advice for every beat. Her commitment to supporting all health and medical researchers across Australia is inspirational – her knowledge and political acumen has led to major health policy change to improve our capacity to deliver as scientists and clinicians. You are a superstar Cath, you have worked tirelessly to protect the health and medical research sector in Australia – THANK YOU.

Associate Professor Phoebe Phillips,  
ASMR President — 2015

“Ms West has been a tireless servant to Medical Research for near on three decades. Her advice and support has helped the development of many medical research leaders over that time. The concepts she instilled of corporate responsibility, ethical behaviour and fairness were always guiding principles that helped shape the actions of dozens of research leaders.

She never seeks credit for the extraordinary amount of work she has done personally, well above the expectations of her official role, and for these reasons she is a most worthy person for this recognition. She was never just doing her job!

Her knowledge of the medical research sector is second to none and many of the commissioned reviews and reports used by the sector and governments were her initiative despite her propensity to suggest it was someone else's idea. This humility and quiet grace has embedded her in the hearts and minds of many, many of us who have worked with her in ASMR. I cannot speak more highly of her and consider her akin to a national treasure.

Professor Rob Ramsay,  
ASMR President — 2000

“Cath's contribution to the ASMR and the influence the Society has had in the recognition of the field of medical research in the Australian community is the embodiment of the Order of Australia awards system. She has acquitted her paid role with exemplary fashion, but it is what she has contributed above and beyond in the development of so many young people who have gone on to their own outstanding achievements that is most significant.

Many past ASMR Presidents and Directors still count Cath as a mentor and friend. They continue to seek her counsel and guidance long after their term on the Board has ended.

The undoubted success of ASMR is due to the stewardship of Catherine West. Those of us who have had the privilege of working alongside Cath are not only better leaders, but better people.

Dr Maree Overall,  
ASMR Life Member

“It goes without saying that Cath West has been the heartbeat of ASMR for over 30 years. She has been an extraordinary sage and guiding hand for generations of eager but often 'green' HMR researchers cutting their advocacy teeth on the ASMR National Board, and has been the driving force for ASMR in shaping the HMR sector. We all owe Cath a massive debt of gratitude.

Professor Mark Hulett,  
ASMR President — 2008



Dr Emma Parkinson-Lawrence  
and Cath West

# ASMR Medical Research Week® 2021

ASMR Medical Research Week® was held from June 4 to 11 this year. It is the flagship activity for The Australian Society for Medical Research, and a major highlight of the Australian health and medical research calendar, bringing the message of the benefits of health and medical research to the Australian public.

With COVID-19 restrictions around the Nation, each state hosted MRW events that would enable researchers within each state to come together either in a virtual format or face to face to share their research, ideas, to network with others and progress their career development.

## ASMR Medical Research Week® Events for 2021

**Annual ASMR VIC Student Research Symposium**, held on June 4th as an online meeting, and Gala Dinner, held on June 7th.

**Newcastle ASMR Medallist Networking Event**, held on June 7th.

**ASMR WA Student Symposium**, held on 9th June as an online virtual meeting, and Gala Dinner, held on June 4th.

**Annual ASMR SA Scientific Meeting**, held on 9th June as a face-to-face meeting, and Gala Dinner, held on June 7th.

**Annual ASMR Qld Postgraduate Student Symposium**, held as a virtual meeting on June 9th and 10th, and Gala Dinner, held on June 7th.

**ASMR Medical Research Week® NSW Annual Scientific Meeting**, held on 10th June as an online meeting, and Gala Dinner, held on June 7th.

**Tasmania ASMR Medical Research Week® Virtual Symposium**, held on June 11th.



SA Scientific Meeting



WA Student Symposium



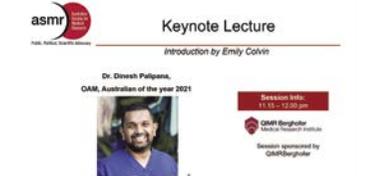
SA Gala dinner



WA Gala dinner



Qld Gala dinner



Qld Postgraduate Student Symposium



Newcastle Networking Event



NSW Gala dinner



ASMR President Dr Ryan Davis at the NSW Gala Dinner

# ‘Hearing versus Listening’

## ASMR Medalist 2021: Professor Kelvin Kong

We were pleased to return to some semblance of a medalist tour for 2021, albeit approached with caution due to the very real possibility of snap lockdowns and border closures. Across three days during ASMR Medical Research Week® there were live presentations to the Sydney gala event and at the National Press Club, as well as livestreams to gala events in Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia and Newcastle.

This year’s medal was awarded to Professor Kelvin Kong, an ENT surgeon, researcher, advocate and trailblazer for health equality. Professor Kong shared his passion for ear health and the very addressable issue of childhood ear disease in Australia. The stark reality is that the ‘lucky country’ has some of the worst ear disease statistics in the world, in fact they are considered fourth-world by World Health



ASMR Medallist Professor Kelvin Kong presenting at the National Press Club of Australia.

Organisation standards. Despite the availability of relatively simple but effective treatments for this condition, there still exists a dichotomy of access to healthcare that can boil down to the postcode one lives in.

The hearing loss associated with ear disease causes developmental and social issues that have been shown to lead to poor education, incarceration and life outcomes. This is where Professor Kong is making headway in closing the gap to change the outcomes for children with ear disease. *“We’re trying to achieve equity in our country. So that every child born in this country, no matter who you are, no matter where you are, has equal access to healthcare, has equal access to education and has equal access to a dream, a simple dream of becoming whatever they want to be”.*

Professor Kong said that the indigenous community had always been participants in research, but their perception of research had grown to be negative. He highlighted the need to change that perception through research co-design (or as he likes to call it “common sense”) with the community in every area of research from molecular to translational. *“Involving the patients and community in research helps to ground translational research so the messaging gets through to both [researchers and the community]. We have a moral obligation to create an effective and evidence-based environment”.*

Professor Kong believes the right research question should always be “what are we trying to achieve?”. *“The reason we do research, the reason we do this kind of work, is to make a better Australia for everyone. It’s about making a difference to someone’s life and I go back to and contest, this is why we do research.”*



ASMR Medallist Professor Kelvin Kong presenting at the NSW Gala Dinner that was broadcast around Australia to other Gala Events.

We congratulate Kelvin, his family, his community and his colleagues on this award, as was his insistence that they all have a share in the work he does and are all deserving of the recognition.



ASMR President Dr Ryan Davis introducing ASMR Medallist Professor Kelvin Kong at the NSW Gala Dinner.

## ASMR Research Awards

The ASMR Research Awards are offered annually to support postgraduate and early career researchers (<3 years post-PhD) in undertaking a short period of research at a distal institution within Australia.

In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on international travel, the ASMR is offering only a National Research Award (\$2000) in 2021.

Applications close 16th October 2021.

Applicants must be current ASMR members

For more information, see: <https://asmr.org.au/research-awards/>



60<sup>TH</sup> ASMR NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

# INSPIRATION to IMPLEMENTATION

EXAMINING THE RESEARCH PIPELINE FROM DISCOVERY  
TO TRANSLATION AND INNOVATION

Join us for the ASMR's Diamond Jubilee virtual  
National Scientific Conference on 22-23 November

A great opportunity to present at a National conference,  
hear the latest in multidisciplinary research and  
network with peers from across Australia

## Conference highlights include:

Firkin and Edwards Orations and inspiring plenary speakers

Peter Doherty Leading Light award presentation

Oral and poster presentations selected from abstracts

Professional development sessions

Panel discussion on how to position your research for impact,  
quality and consumer engagement

Virtual networking

Awards for oral and poster presentations and the prestigious  
Campion Ma Playoust award for the best presentation overall

Registrations and abstract submissions are now open at  
[asmr.org.au/asmr-nsc](http://asmr.org.au/asmr-nsc)



60 YEARS OF PUBLIC, POLITICAL AND SCIENTIFIC ADVOCACY

22 - 23 NOVEMBER 2021 | [ASMR.ORG.AU/ASMR-NSC](http://asmr.org.au/asmr-nsc)

## AWT EDWARDS ORATOR

**Professor David Craik**  
PhD, FAA, FRS, UQ Laureate Fellow



Did you know that cyclic peptides can be grown  
in the backyard and may be the future of designer  
drugs?

In the early 90's, Professor Craik discovered a unique family of cyclic peptides  
that could be the next line of super drugs.

"We can use these ultra-stable cyclotides to make targeted, potent drugs and  
agrichemicals".

Resistant to degradation in the digestive tract and able to be grown  
economically as medicinal plants, cyclotide drugs may be an answer to making  
drug therapies more accessible worldwide.

## FIRKIN ORATOR

**Professor Dame Jane Harding**  
DNZM MBChB DPhil FRACP FRSNZ



Professor Harding is a Neonatologist whose seminal  
discoveries revolutionised clinical care of premature babies.

She led the world-first clinical trial that showed dextrose gel is an effective  
treatment for low blood glucose often encountered in premature babies.

This circumvented the need to separate mother and baby for treatment and has  
been shown to have long-term benefits for brain development, growth and  
educational achievement.

Her on-going research concerns the role of nutrition and growth factors in the  
regulation of growth before and after birth, blood glucose regulation in the  
newborn, and longterm consequences of treatments given around birth.

## Affiliate Members

ANZAC Research Institute  
 Australasian College of Dermatologists  
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 Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists  
 Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists  
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 Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand  
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 University of Queensland Diamantina Institute  
 Westmead Institute for Medical Research

## Associate Members

Arthritis Australia  
 Australian Alzheimer's Research Foundation  
 Australian Red Cross Life Blood  
 Australian Respiratory Council  
 Clifford Craig Foundation

Foundation for High Blood Pressure Research  
 Haemophilia Foundation of Australia  
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 Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation  
 Lupus Australia

MS Research Australia  
 Scleroderma Association of NSW  
 William Angliss Charitable Fund

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Research Australia



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