

Two young heart research scientists bring medical research to life and inspire students in
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Heart researchers don't miss a beat

Did you know one in three people die from heart, stroke and vascular-related disease worldwide?

Two young researchers from Melbourne's Baker Heart Research Institute are finding ways to reduce this statistic. Dr Belinda Smith and Dr Juliana Soosairajah have diverse backgrounds yet together work toward a common goal.

Soosairajah fled ethnic war in Sri Lanka, migrating to Australia when she was a young adult. She obtained her scientific qualifications in Australia and now searches for better drugs for people who suffer from stroke and heart attack.

"My childhood dream was to become a medical doctor because we didn't have medical facilities in my village. In Sri Lanka I could have become a medical doctor or engineer or lawyer or accountant.....however I couldn't be a research scientist!. I thought, when I came to Australia, I 'd study something I couldn't do in Sri Lanka and be of much more help to the medical field."

Smith, an Australian-born cardiology research fellow and PhD student, investigates why blood vessels become inflamed and blocked, causing heart attacks and stroke.

"Hopefully if we can understand why these blockages form we can design drugs more intelligently to prevent them."

She adds *"During my cardiology training at St Vincent's hospital over the last two years, I have been frustrated with the limitations of the drugs and therapies. This was the big motivation for me to undertake cardiac research."*

Drs Smith and Soosairajah will speak to high school students at Gisborne Secondary College on Wednesday 27th June as part of the Australian Society for Medical Research's 2007 Regional Schools Tours.

INTERVIEW AND PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES

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High-resolution photographs are available upon request.