

**Touring scientists bring medical research to life and inspire students in
KYNETON, CASTLEMAINE, BENDIGO – JUNE 17 AND 18**

Female Reproduction and Heart Health

Placenta Research For Successful Pregnancies

Dr Ellen Menkhorst alongside three fellow scientists will be touring with the Australian Society for Medical Research's 2008 Regional School Visits, to encourage high school students to consider a career in biomedical science.

Working at Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research, Menkhorst is investigating factors critical in the establishment of pregnancy - when the embryo attaches and then implants into the uterus. There is a sense of wonder in her everyday research, *"I'm fascinated by the paradox of how the uterus can protect itself against pathogens yet allows the fetus to implant and develop into a baby. I enjoy finding the answers – any answer - once I've asked a question, I really want to know how things work."*

On the future impact of her research, Menkhorst says, *"The initiation of embryo attachment to the uterus is a critical stage for the success of pregnancy. Increasing our understanding of this process will allow the development of better treatment options for infertile women."*

Heart Scientist to Inspire Next Generation of Researchers

As a youngster, a love of biology and an inquisitive mind led Dr Sharyn Fitzgerald to pursue a career in medical science. *"I am a curious person and I like to find out how and why things work. I enjoy learning and with my job I am always learning new things specifically about my research and in general across the whole field of medicine."* Fitzgerald, from the Baker Heart Research Institute, Melbourne, is a lead investigator in a study of the long-term effects of stroke on physical and mental well-being. *"During my travels to scientific meetings, I have had the chance to meet two Nobel prize winners and three Australians of the Year – including Prof. Peter Doherty who discovered how immune system T cells work, Sir Gustav Nossal a chief advisor on the WHO vaccine program and Prof. Ian Frazer who discovered the cervical cancer vaccine."* Fitzgerald speaks of the importance of her work: *"Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in Australia. I hope my research increases our understanding of the risk factors and determines ways we can prevent or reduce the development of cardiovascular disease."*

Reproduction Research: What Makes A Good Egg

The ovaries are the twin jewels of the female reproductive system. Yet many women of reproductive age don't always produce healthy eggs from their ovaries. Researching female reproduction, Ms Davina Rosairo, of Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research, explains, *"I look at the eggs of a women and try to figure out what makes some grow into mature, healthy eggs that can potentially be fertilized for a baby, and what makes the majority of them die. If we can understand this, we could potentially have a lot more eggs available for fertilization and reduce infertility rates!"*

Rosairo is excited by where her medical science career is taking her, *"The most interesting thing for me in my research is that I am growing ovaries in a dish. The first time I did it I thought this was so cool and I just wanted to tell everyone!"*

Her passion comes from studying genetics at university, *"I remember being captivated in learning that so many people are born with genetic disorders they are completely helpless from avoiding. It was about then that I decided to get involved in research because I felt if enough people are involved, surely some sort of 'cure' could be developed!"*

WWII Doctor Leaves A Legacy

Inspired as a teenager by the courageous work of Indian war physician Dr. Kotnis, Dr Jyotsna Pippal immigrated to Australia and pursued a career in medical science. Now working at Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research, Pippal recalls, *"I was influenced by the selfless work of Dr. Kotnis who at a very young age left his home to help the soldiers during WWII. He is the only Indian who is revered in China for his selfless service to the wounded soldiers. He performed surgery on more than 800 soldiers and died at 32 years of age."*

Pippal investigates ways to reduce the non-specific effects of medications that are currently used in the treatment of heart disease. *"Heart disease is the number one killer of Australians. The drugs in use today have side effects on kidney function in some patients. We are looking to improve the health outcomes of patients by finding better treatments for people with heart disease."*

INTERVIEW AND PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES - Contact Shahan Campbell 0433 113 454 or Hilary Hoare (0401 240 772). High-resolution photographs are available upon request.

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