

**Three bright scientists bring medical research to life for students in  
LEONGATHA and SALE - JUNE 17<sup>th</sup> AND 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Leongatha girls make a difference in medical research**

Growing up in Leongatha, both science communicator Dr Nancy Ilaya and researcher Ms Michelle Van Sinderen never dreamt that their careers would take them around the world and make a significant contribution to medical science. This is the message that young scientists will be sharing with high school students as part of the Australian Society for Medical Research's 2008 Regional Schools Visits. Ilaya and Van Sinderen join 18 enthusiastic scientists on tours to secondary colleges in regional Victorian, where they will discuss career opportunities and what lead them to come to the 'big smoke' to study.

Ilaya says, *"It was all an accident - I did a science degree to specialise in pathology but was instead offered two scholarships to do a PhD in neuroscience".*

Her PhD study investigated the neurological condition, Alzheimer's disease. *"During my PhD I was actively involved in teaching medicine at Melbourne University and learned that I didn't want to be a medical doctor and that I really enjoyed biomedical science communication, education and public relations."* Ilaya is now a biomedical research training officer at the Australian Stem Cell Centre where she develops and coordinates postgraduate research programs and teaches biomedicine at the University of Melbourne. *"I enjoy traveling, meeting people including politicians and VIPs and advocating biomedical research and its importance."*

Van Sinderen relishes her involvement in medical research. *"During my 2<sup>nd</sup> year undergraduate course I got a job as a laboratory technician and after talking to researchers I was hooked, I knew exactly what I wanted to do."* Currently enrolled at Monash University as a PhD student, Van Sinderen is looking at the effects of sex hormones, estrogen and testosterone, on obesity and insulin resistant diabetes at Prince Henry's Institute, Sex Hormone Biology Laboratory. She was thrilled to recently travel overseas to a conference in New Zealand to discuss her findings with experts in the field, *"I enjoy working in diabetes research and hope to make discoveries that may lead to improving people's lives."*

The scientists will return to Leongatha and visit students at Leongatha Secondary College, and schools in Sale on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> June and Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> June as part of the Australian Society for Medical Research's 2008 Medical Research Week ®.

- **Nancy Ilaya**, Biomedical research training officer, Australian Stem Cell Centre/ University of Melbourne. Nancy did her PhD studies on the neurological disease, Alzheimer's. She is a former Leongatha student.
- **Ayan Dasvarma**, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Australian Stem Cell Centre. Ayan's research involves growing stem cells in synthetic scaffolds to regenerate and repair tissue damaged, such as in the case of burn victims.
- **Michelle Van Sinderen**, PhD student, Prince Henry's Institute, Sex Hormone Biology Group. Michelle's PhD study involves assessing the effects of sex hormones on obesity and diabetes. She is a former Leongatha student.

For more information or to speak to the researchers, please contact Shehnaaz Manji (0402 146 690) or Shahan Campbell (0433 113 454). High resolution photographs are available upon request.