

ASMR Medical Research Week®

Media Release Tuesday 13th June 2006

Scientists visit Vic Regional Schools June 13 and 14

KYNETON – BRADFORD – BENALLA – YARRAWONGA - WANGARATTA

Our speakers:

- **Jenny Chow** – researching the effect estrogen has on the way our bodies process fat
- **Johanna Wapling** - on the hunt for new HIV targets
- **John Luis Moretti** – investigating the role of the brain in the maintenance of high blood pressure
- **Rishika Pace**, detecting mutations and protein defects in children affected by severe muscular dystrophy.
- **Cathryn Hogarth (Wangaratta's own)** – focusing on how proteins get shuttled around the cell
- **Daniella Brasacchio** – genetic complications in people with type 1 diabetes
- **Natalie Hannan**, human pregnancy and particularly embryo implantation with a focus on infertility
- **Chelsea Stoikos**, Activin and the role it plays in early pregnancy and infertility.

For more information or to speak to the researchers, please contact Nicola Smith (0412 101 871) or Shahan Campbell (043 311 3454). High resolution photographs are available on request.

Speaker stories follow for Joanna Wapling, Daniella Brasacchio, Cathryn Hogarth, Natalie Hannan and Chelsea Stoikos

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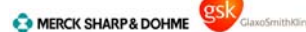


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Johanna Wapling - University student on the hunt for new HIV drugs

New drugs are needed for combating HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) because the virus has found ways to escape the actions of existing treatments. This 'drug-resistant' HIV then proceeds to destroy the patient's immune system, leading to AIDS.

Johanna Wapling, a talented PhD student from the Burnet Institute in Melbourne, is investigating new ways to treat HIV infection. It is hoped that Wapling's research will prolong the lives of HIV positive patients.

"In the future, we hope to design a novel, effective, new generation of anti-HIV drugs. I would like to see these drugs getting to the people who need them most."

On tour with the Australian Society for Medical Research's 2006 Regional School Visits, Wapling will be encouraging secondary school students in Kyneton to consider a future career in medical science.

"I'm constantly inspired by my fellow young researchers, the work they are doing and the way they think about it, it's great to be able to bounce ideas off these people. I really hope we can make a difference."

As an advocate for public awareness of medical research, Wapling comments,

"Gone are the days when lab coats were only for mad scientists. Ask us questions, get involved in public debates about our research, and support us. We are working hard to provide better treatments, prevent diseases and keep you healthier. We can't do it without your support!"

Daniella Brasacchio - Diabetes side-effects: it's all in the genes

Type 1 or juvenile diabetes affects thousands of young Australians, resulting in life-long dependence on insulin and an increased chance of cardiovascular disease. Daniella Brasacchio, a young PhD student at the Baker Heart Research Institute, hopes that her research will shed light on how the complications of diabetes develop.

"People don't die of diabetes, they die from the cardiovascular side-effects, such as heart attack and stroke, caused by years of uncontrolled blood sugars. My work looks at whether high blood sugars seen in diabetes can affect how genes are turned on and off."

Brasacchio has always been interested in how the body works, but was prompted to begin diabetes research after a member of her family was diagnosed with the disease.

"My grandma has type 2 diabetes, so that got me interested in how something as simple as sugars in the diet could cause so much suffering".

Ms Brasacchio joins three other leading researchers on the 2006 Australian Society for Medical Research Regional School Visits of secondary colleges in Broadford, Benalla, Yarrowonga and Wangaratta on Tuesday 13th June and Wednesday 14th June.

Chelsea Stoikos and Natalie Hannan - Talented young researchers tackle infertility

Teenagers are more than familiar with the actions of hormones, but two young medical researchers from Prince Henry's Institute in Melbourne are traveling to northern Victoria to tell high school students that hormones can be fun, too.

Chelsea Stoikos and Natalie Hannan join volunteers around Victoria to discuss the joys of a career in medical research as part of the Australian Society for Medical Research's Regional School Visits.

Stoikos studies endometriosis, a disease affecting more than 1 in 10 females of reproductive age.

"Endometriosis causes period pain and sometimes infertility. My research compares human samples from women with endometriosis to those of unaffected women in the hope of finding new factors that cause the disease. By identifying new causes, we can design drugs that will prevent or stop the development of endometriosis before symptoms appear".

Hannan was inspired to enter fertility research after her sister successfully used IVF to conceive her first child.

"Embryo implantation is critical for pregnancy. I am looking at the early stages of pregnancy, where the embryo has to implant into the uterus. Understanding normal implantation will mean that we can identify what goes wrong for women who can't go through this process".

Ms Hannan and Ms Stoikos join two other leading young researchers on a tour of high schools in Broadford, Benalla, Yarrawonga and Wangaratta on Tuesday 13th June and Wednesday 14th June.

Cathryn Hogarth - Understanding Sperm Function

A former student of Wangaratta High School, high achiever, Cathryn Hogarth, is a PhD student at Monash Institute of Medical Research. *Winner of the 2004 WISE (Women in Scientific Excellence) Award and the NIH (National Institutes of Health) and Australian Academy of Science Junior Scientist Award in March 2005*

Her PhD work is focused on analyzing the machinery that drives the development of sperm in the testis.

This work is important for Australia where 1 out of every 25 men have fertility problems, the cause of which is, for many, unknown. An increased understanding of sperm function and development is required to give researchers and clinicians the tools needed to begin to understand some of these problems.

For more information or to speak to the researchers, please contact Nicola Smith (0412 101 871) or Shahan Campbell (043 311 3454). High resolution photographs are available on request.

Full Program available from www.asmr.org.au/media/index.html

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