

President's Report

Welcome to the first ASMR newsletter of 2013. It is a privilege to serve as the 52nd President of the Australian Society for Medical Research, and along with the ASMR Board of Directors to represent Australian Health and Medical researchers as we continue with our goals to provide scientific, political and public advocacy for our sector. Through our Board of Directors, past and current, the Executive Office, our State Committees and all our members we have celebrated numerous achievements and events over the past 52 years of the society, and we will continue to do so into the future.

2012 continued to be an important year for Australia's Health & Medical Research sector, with the McKeon review of the Health & Medical Research Sector and the broader review of Australian Research and Innovation by the Chief Scientist, Professor Ian Chubb. ASMR provided submissions to both these reviews, and met with the review panels to present and discuss our proposals for a sustainable, vibrant and internationally competitive future for Australia's Health and Medical Research (HMR) sector. These proposals were also presented to a number of our federal politicians, from all sides of Government as well as to the Department of Finance and Deregulation and the Department of Treasury. As we enter an election year in 2013 it is essential for all ASMR members to continue to present our messages and requests for sustainable funding for our sector throughout this year, to all politicians. In our discussions with politicians and Government Departments we are confident we have presented an achievable and feasible approach that is supported and illustrated by the evidence in our commissioned reports. These reports are available on our website and I encourage you all to use them in your discussions with Government and within the sector.

2013 promises to be another important year for HMR in Australia. ASMR will continue its advocacy on behalf of the sector, proposing constructive, evidence based pathways to ensure the best possible health and wellbeing outcomes for this generation and those to come.

We must now all be aware of the frightening projected increases in health costs reported by government. For example the 2010 Intergenerational Report shows that in 2003, 9.3% of GDP was spent on health in

Australia. This figure is projected to increase to 12.4% of GDP in 2033. A continued escalation of this magnitude is unsustainable for any economy and action must be taken now if we wish to ensure affordable and available health care for all Australians into the future.

In this election year ASMR Directors will continue to meet with politicians from all sides of Government to inform, educate and advocate our plan for attenuating the approaching health budget blow out. ASMR's 2013 prebudget again requested investment by the Federal Government into the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to be pegged as a percentage of the total annual health spend. At present the Government investment into NHMRC sits at around 0.8% — we propose for this to be increased to 1% in 2013, with incremental increases of 0.2% annually to reach 3% of the total health spend by 2023. This approach will benefit all Australians, with funding supporting the development and delivery of better approaches and care for patients; building and maintaining a strong, innovative and internationally competitive HMR; and protecting Australia from unsustainable economic costs associated with our ageing population and increased incidence of chronic disease.

We are advised that the McKeon Review was recently submitted to the Hon Tanya Pliibersek, for her consideration. It is our hope that the Minister will recognize the need for the implementation of a strategic plan that brings new and sustained investment into NHMRC to address a growing national problem.

ASMR's response to the McKeon Review is available on our website — asmr.org.au/breakingnews.html

Professor Naomi Rogers
ASMR President



Professor Naomi Rogers

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ASMR celebrates its Newest Life Member: **Professor Robert Ramsay**

It has been a genuine honour to be made a Life Member of ASMR; the 10th in its 52 year history. Each Life Member has contributed to the Society in different ways. For me it is difficult, if not uncomfortable to contemplate the way others consider my role in the Society against the back-drop of such a long record of ASMR serving the research community. So I would rather describe what drives me to support the young research leaders of the future, how I continue to have a passion for Medical Research and why the Board's political advocacy is so important to the Health and Medical community.

Over the last decade or so I have noticed that even some members of ASMR question why there has been such a focus on political engagement. My first point is that ASMR has always had a political backbone. No one could credibly argue that Sir Professor Gus Nossal, one of the founding ASMR fathers and Life Members, all of sudden became such a revered advocate for medical research just because he became the WEHI Director. Political and social advocacy has always been part of his, and ASMR's DNA. As I watch Naomi take over from Paul as President it strikes me how amazing their efforts have been in the last year getting into the ears of the most influential parts of government; Finance and Treasury. I also look back over the last decade and celebrate how ASMR has been essentially the only source of facts about the research sector work force, research returns and economic forecasting out to 2050. It is interesting to me how everyone in the sector uses the data while so few attribute the source.

The reason the machinery of government is listening to ASMR is that the data are credible, independently evaluated, and I might say rather frightening! Treasury and Finance are, like us, worried that the Health sector will implode and drag our economy into an abyss. A central truth is that although the leadership in Finance and Treasury may change with election cycles the body and memory of these Departments endure and remain influential. They are charged with ensuring the economy runs long-term, they are driven by data and listen to economically sound advice. ASMR has always argued soberly and, in the last decade, has a portfolio of commissioned reports that bring credibility and access. With such a back drop of solid argument and data, Prime Ministers, Treasurers and Health Ministers are reassured that when, as they have in the past and continue to do so now, support Medical Research that they are making sound investments in the economy. They however sometimes need to be reminded that these investments project decades into the future and here is where government departments like Treasury and Finance are so important and powerful.

I am no longer a young researcher and by most measures I am part of the establishment. ASMR is an organisation for young researcher-leaders who look forward and wish to shape the future. ASMR's role is not to entrench the *status quo* and I certainly believe young researchers are more nimble and less conflicted when talking to our political masters. Politicians like to spend time listening to passionate researchers with fresh ideas and are more likely to believe in what they say if they are not part of the 'establishment'. As young enthusiastic scientists they are not asking for special project funds or a new building, rather they discuss what excites them and what is on their future horizons. Regarding ASMR I get greatest pleasure in listening and supporting the Executive and the Board members discovering how politicians are so willing to give ASMR their time. So as part of a cohort of Past-Presidents our role is to support the elected Board, provide a corporate memory and occasional open a door here and there. But it is not about setting policy, or the agenda for the Board; we have had our chance, for better or worse. The future is for those with fresh ideas and of course they will be harvesting the rewards or consequence of their efforts now; when one day they take over the mantle of 'established researchers'.

Professor Rob Ramsay receives his ASMR Life Membership from Dr Paul Dawson.



ASMR Life Member, Professor Rob Ramsay

ASMR Medallist 2012

We are delighted to announce that this year's ASMR Medical Research Week® Medallist is Professor Anna Wirz-Justice, PhD, emeritus Professor and Research Fellow at the Centre for Chronobiology, Psychiatric Clinics of the University of Basel, Switzerland. Anna's research interests focus on human chronobiology, sleep regulation and light therapy for the treatment of depressive illness and sleep disorders.

Among her many accomplishments, Professor Wirz-Justice built a distinguished career at the world-renowned Centre for Chronobiology at the University of Basel. The group studies the basic physiology of human circadian rhythms that may lead to novel treatments. Professor Wirz-Justice and fellow researchers at the Basel psychiatric clinic were one of the first groups in the world to study the antidepressant effects of one night's sleep deprivation — "wake therapy" — still recognised as the most potent antidepressant available. More than 25 years ago, Anna introduced light therapy to Europe for the treatment of seasonal affective disorder, and carried out research into its efficacy and mechanisms. Anna was instrumental in producing the first light and wake therapy manual for clinicians, *Chronotherapeutics for Affective Disorders*. In 2002, Anna received the Scholar's Prize of the City of Basel, awarded for outstanding scientific achievement.

Anna is a director of The Center for Environmental Therapeutics, formed in 2004 to advise clinicians on the implementation of light and wake therapies as adjuncts to drug

treatment of major depression. The virtual Center (www.cet.org) is made up of a multidisciplinary team of eminent researchers and clinicians — experts in mental health, ophthalmology and optical physics, electrical engineering, biochemistry, physiology and gerontology — who are committed to pooling their efforts toward the development and application of effective environmental therapies.

We are excited to have such a passionate and inspiring researcher as the 2013 ASMR Medical Research Week® Medallist. We are looking forward to her fascinating presentations at the ASMR Gala Dinners, including a broadcast to ASMR Medical Research Week® Dinners in some regional centres, as well as at the National Press Club in Canberra.



Professor Anna Wirz-Justice, ASMR Medallist 2013.

52nd ASMR National Scientific Conference
Save the Date!
17th–20th November 2013
Ballarat Lodge, Victoria
www.asmr-nsc.org.au

Bringing together experts from a diverse range of specialities: Scientists, clinicians, dieticians, exercise physiologists and allied health workers.

In a quest to cross-fertilise the specialities and diseases, complimentary topics will be explored with a special emphasis on the **prevention of ageing.**

Session topics include:

- diabetes and obesity
- arthritis, osteoporosis, bone
- brain and dementia
- cardiovascular and skeletal muscle disease
- exercise and nutrition

Edwards Orator:
 Professor Stephen J. Simpson,
 University of Sydney, NSW

Firkin Orator:
 Dr Rafael de Cabo,
 National Institute of Aging, USA

ASMR Comes of Age and Moves Out

Since its humble beginnings, ASMR has been engaged in public, political and scientific advocacy on behalf of the health and medical research community in this country. For many of those fifty-one years, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians provided office space for the Society in their Sydney premises in Macquarie Street. The Society is indebted to the RACP for their strong and enabling support.

In 2012, the Society invested in its own office space

at Suite 702, Level 7, 37 Bligh Street, Sydney. The new premises provide room for growth and are an indication of the confidence, maturity and stability of our Society as we move into the second half of our first century.

Cath West
 Senior Executive Officer, ASMR



ASMR's new head office

The Past, Present and Future of AHMRC



Professor Jim Best,
Professor Steven Nicholls,
ASMR past President
Professor Steve Wesselingh
and Professor John Hopwood.

A decade of collaboration

More than a decade ago ASMR embarked on an ambitious endeavour; to host a multidisciplinary health & medical research congress. The latest instalment of the biannual franchise was recently held in Adelaide (November, 2012) with sixteen professional associations and societies joining in the 6th AHMRC. The strength of the AHMRC is the opportunity for collaboration. This traditionally has produced sessions of exceptional interest, and this year was no exception. Symposia on the importance of sleep during pregnancy, the use of stem cells in transplantation medicine and the role of Vitamin D in bone health, were a few noteworthy examples.

NHMRC CEO
Professor Warwick Anderson
at the opening of AHMRC.

Addressing the big challenges



AHMRC commenced with a forum on the future health challenges facing Australia. With an ageing population and changing lifestyles, the issues confronting us now are different to those faced by previous generations. A distinguished line up of speakers shared their views on several important areas. Cardiovascular disease (Professor Steven Nicholls), diabetes and obesity (Professor David James) and mental health (Professor Helen

Christensen) already reduce the quality of life for many Australians. All speakers discussed how to adopt modern technologies for better diagnosis and patient outcomes. Professor Andrew Biankin examined the role of genetics in personalized medicine and Professor John Hopwood shared his experiences in bringing new medicines into the clinic. The pressing healthcare challenges facing indigenous Australians was discussed by Professor Sandra Eades and further examined in a public forum (see article by Paul Dawson). This symposium was the ideal way to open the congress.

Future Directions for Congress

Modern technology already impacts on all areas of HMR, and will continue to be embraced. Accordingly, the new frontiers in science are to be realized by truly trans-disciplinary interactions. Engineering, bioinformatics and physics will help to address big, new questions. AHMRC will look to collaborate broadly with researchers in these disciplines. Towards this goal, symposia on 'new imaging technologies' and 'nanotechnology' proved popular at the 6th AHMRC.

I would like to thank the members of the programming committee and Maree Overall and her team at ASN Events for all their hard work. The Congress greatly appreciates the generous support of all of sponsors and partners.

**Dr Steven Polyak,
Convener 6th AHMRC**

Please visit our photo gallery @ ahmrccongress.org.au/photo-gallery-page/

National Scientific Meeting



ASMR President
Dr Paul Dawson,
NSC Convener
Dr Rosemary Keogh,
Firkin Orator
Professor Colin Sibley
and ASMR president-elect
Professor Naomi Rogers.

The 51st ASMR National Scientific Conference was held in Adelaide in 2012 as part of the 6th AHMRC. The theme was 'A healthy start to life' with a focus on placental research. The meeting was a great success with many highlights including the two guest orators, Professor Colin Sibley (University of Manchester, Firkin orator) and Professor Sarah Robertson (University of Adelaide, Edwards orator), who delivered fantastic presentations that generated much interest including coverage in the press. A bumper program showcased topics including epigenetics, immunology, cell migration, vascular biology, transport and a special shared session with the Australasian Sleep Association on sleep and pregnancy. It was particularly rewarding to see many speakers present unpublished and preliminary findings and so many researchers support the program not only

as speakers, but also by attending sessions and contributing to lively question and answer discussions. Oral and poster judging presented a challenge with an extremely high standard of presentations. Joanne Rakoczy (University of Queensland) won the prestigious ASMR Champion-Ma-Playoust award and Justine Stamford (University of Adelaide) was judged the best student poster and represented ASMR in the Best of the Best poster award — congratulations to both winners. Thank you to all those who helped make the meeting so enjoyable and such a great success from the international and national speakers, chairs and participants, to the sponsors and organisers.

**Dr Rosemary Keogh,
Convener, 51st ASMR NSC**

Indigenous women's and babies health

ASMR continues to support new initiatives in health and medical research that have the capacity to improve the health of indigenous Australians. In 2011, the theme *"Indigenous Health: Action on Prevention"* was chosen to mark the Society's 50th year anniversary. A report on that conference is published in the 2012 September issue of the journal, *Rural and Remote Health*. To continue ASMR's advocacy for Indigenous health research, our Society held a forum, *"Better Health Outcomes for Mums and Bubs"* in Adelaide, 26 November 2012.

Sparking lively discussion with members of the public, Mr Joshua Cremer (barrister-in-law and President of Indigenous Lawyers Assoc. Queensland) chaired discussions with some of Australia's leading advocates for improving Indigenous health, including Professor Bronwyn Fredericks (Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Engagement CQU), Professor Ngjare Brown (Professor Indigenous Health and Education Uni Wollongong), Ms Sandra Campbell (PhD student Uni Adelaide), Professor Roger Smith (Director Mothers and Babies Research Centre Uni Newcastle) and Professor Sue Kildea (Professor Midwifery Mater Health Services and Australian Catholic University).

Early life events during the year before and after birth contribute to disparities in Indigenous life-long health outcomes — a message echoed by all speakers. Poor nutrition, smoking, alcohol and stress in pregnancy, are linked to preterm birth and growth restriction of the newborn baby, which may lead to increased risk of diabetes, heart and kidney disease, and premature death in adulthood. In addition, these harmful lifestyles

during pregnancy may be passed to the baby through epigenetics, giving rise to health disadvantage in future generations.

There was strong consensus that Indigenous maternal and early child-care is not working at a satisfactory level. So what needs to be done for improving mums and bubs health, and how do we go about implementing these changes? The answer lies within listening to the voices of Indigenous Australians. Some of the voiced recommendations include: (1) engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with emerging Indigenous health centres in all facets of women's health; (2) providing low cost but healthy food in both urban and remote Indigenous communities; (3) ensuring we have culturally safe and responsive maternity care, including primary maternity "birthing in country" centres and "safe women's places" that build parenting capacity.

The first step towards implementing these recommendations would greatly benefit from the NHMRC reinstating *"A healthy start to life"* priority, with co-funding from both State and Federal Governments to establish maternity health care centres of excellence. Implementation of these nation-wide changes is urgently needed to achieve better health outcomes for current and future generations of Indigenous Australians.

A podcast of this symposium is available from the ASMR website: asmr.org.au/PublicEventsReports.html

Dr Paul Dawson,
2012 ASMR President



Professor Sandra Eades and Uncle Lewis O'Brien with ASMR directors Ms Yvette Roe and Congress Convener Dr Steven Polyak.

ASMR Mentoring Program

The ASMR invites members who are 2 to 12 years postdoctoral to participate in the ASMR Mentoring Program. Applications are accepted all year round and the program is free to ASMR members.

For additional information and application forms please visit <http://www.asmr.org.au/Mentor.html>

Professional Development for Early and Mid Career Researchers

A well trained Health and Medical Research (HMR) workforce is essential to ensuring Australian HMR continues to build on its a proven track record of delivering exceptional economic and health returns to the nation. For this reason ASMR places great import on professional development. Early career researchers who attended ASMR's Professional Development sessions at AHMRC were left armed with a great deal of invaluable incite from expert panellists and moderators. Professor Maria Kavallaris (Children's Cancer Institute Australia) set the scene, introducing the themes of 1) obtaining funding, and 2) establishing a research team. Facilitator, Dr Sarah Meachem, drew out pearls of wisdom from the expert panellists on the right time to apply for grants and fellowships, through to

what to ask for when establishing your lab and how to attract and train students.

A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the importance of mentors and how to make the most of them as they can be utilised for a great deal more than just providing feedback on grant and fellowship proposals. ASMR is recognises the vital role good mentoring plays in a researcher's career success and, runs a mentoring program, facilitating matches between mentorees and mentors for its members. Information on ASMR's mentoring program can be found on our website.

Dr Amanda Philp, ASMR Professional Development Co-Convener

Social media and the Life Scientist



Dr Robyn Meech,
convener of the forum
on social media.

Most of us use some form of Social Media in our everyday life, but how might it enhance our scientific careers? This was the subject of a workshop entitled 'Social Media for the Life Scientist' held by the Australian Society for Stem Cell Research (ASSCR) during the 2012 AHMRC in Adelaide. Speakers in this session were stem cell researcher Paul Knoepfler (via Skype from University of California), freelancer writer Sarah Keenihan and PhD student and blogger Noby Leong.

Paul gave a guided tour of his blog, ipscell.com, where he comments on high profile stem cell papers and methods, political issues that impact stem cell science, ethics, clinical trials and unregulated stem cell therapies. He also uses his blog to educate the public about stem cells. Paul said that blogging probably took over an hour of his time daily, but that the engagement it afforded with other scientists and the public was very rewarding. Asked whether he thought that his posts could ever have negative impact on his career (for example when critiquing the work of others), he indicated that he wouldn't post something that he wouldn't be willing to say to someone directly. He also stated that his University had been generally supportive of his often highly political blog.

Sarah Keenihan extended the discussion about University policies on Social Media use by staff and students. She pointed out that you could be held accountable for comments made using personal social media if they are deemed to represent your University in a bad light. Sarah also fielded questions about keeping personal social media outlets separate from your professional ones. She suggested using some forms of media such as twitter, blogs, and science forums for presenting professional views, while perhaps keeping other outlets such as personal Facebook profiles private.

Noby Leong talked about making personal connections via twitter and blogging. He valued the immediacy of twitter for venting the day-to-day frustrations (or triumphs) of lab-work. Both Noby and Sarah discussed the challenges of tweeting something interesting and meaningful in 140 characters: it takes practice to do it well. Similarly, blogs need to be kept fresh and interesting to maintain an audience.

Noby and Sarah discussed using Twitter as a networking tool. Noby said that he found himself tweeting with people that he would never have made a connection with otherwise, and that for young investigators, tweeting is a way to break the ice that is easier than the 'cold-calling' approach of emails. Even at conferences, participating in twitter conversations relating to the presentations may make it easier for junior scientists to approach other delegates in person between sessions or at mixers. Sarah also suggested that once you are familiar with Twitter and want to take it a step further, you can refine your experience and make it more streamlined by:

- Using hashtags (#) to follow specific topics;
- Creating lists of people you follow to manage your stream;
- Participating in organised chats, such as #onsci and #phdchat;
- Using platforms such as Hootsuite or Tweetdeck; and
- Using Storify (storify.com) to see and create permanent archives.

Further information and useful resources are posted on our Facebook page.

Dr Robyn Meech

Blogging about science can be rewarding but also time consuming — you must decide what you want to achieve with your blog, how much time you can devote to it, and be sure it is enhancing, not overwhelming your professional life;

Twitter is not just for following news and trends but is also a useful networking tool;

Think before you tweet — your comments stay in the twitter-sphere;

Check your University's or relevant Institution's social media policy before launching into it;

Consider creating a boundary between your personal and your professional online presence;

Social media is becoming integral to scientific communication, jump in and see what it can do for you.

ASMR Research Award — Domestic Winner: **Ms Shervi Lie**

With the generous support of the ASMR, I spent five weeks in the laboratory of Dr Catherine Sutter at the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute. The aim here was to unravel new mechanisms of regulating protein expression in response to maternal under-nutrition around the time of conception.

During my PhD studies I specifically focussed upon the periconceptional period, which includes the oocyte maturation and preimplantation stages. We believe this to be a critical time during development as perturbation can lead to the development of metabolic diseases later in adult life such as obesity and type 2 diabetes.

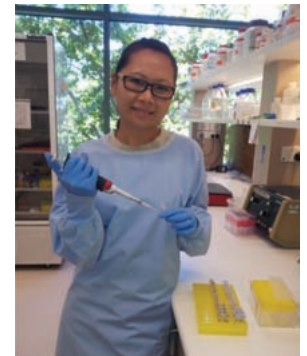
Using quantitative real time PCR and Western blotting techniques I investigated changes in the mRNA expression and protein abundance of several key factors that regulate metabolism. This was performed in the liver, skeletal muscle and fat cells of control animals and those exposed to under-nutrition around the time of conception.

Importantly, in the majority of the targets quantified, I discovered a disconnect between the mRNA expression and the protein abundance. This discrepancy lead me to believe that maternal under-nutrition around the time of conception may recruit or program specific factor(s) to regulate protein abundance, independent of the mRNA transcripts level. Such factors, I proposed to be microRNAs (miRs).

With my ASMR research award I was able to explore this hypothesis further in the laboratory of Associate Professor Catherine Suter at the Victor Chang Research Institute. Associate Professor Suter's group has extensive knowledge and experience in miRs and the small RNA deep sequencing technique, which is required to quantify the miRs. In addition, she is one of the leading scientists in epigenetic and small non-coding RNA and she also has an interest in the fetal origins of adult disease. Therefore, this collaborative project allowed me to share and broaden my knowledge on the epigenetic aspect of the project. Furthermore, the data that I collected provided mechanistic explanations to the discrepancies I found in my previous data and enabled us to expand our current knowledge on the impact of maternal nutrition during the periconceptional period and its contribution to adult metabolic disease.

The small RNA deep sequencing technique is a cutting edge technique that can be applied in many areas of biomedical research and is likely to be relevant on a number of other diseases. Therefore, this invaluable training also provided me with a competitive edge that will allow me to broaden my research in the future.

Overall, my research experience in Associate Professor Suter's laboratory was very productive and the data I obtained significantly increase the quality of the manuscripts. I would again like to thank the ASMR for providing this opportunity.



Ms Shervi Lie
at work at UniSA.

Past Awardee **New ASMR Director**

I was fortunate enough to receive the ASMR Research Award (Domestic) in 2009, which enabled me to spend a month in August 2010 working on a collaborative project in the lab of Professor Debbie Trinder at the University of Western Australia (UWA).

Two-and-a-half years on, this visit has yielded a number of valuable outcomes including one publication and a continuing collaboration with Professor Trinder's group. But perhaps more importantly, I believe that the benefits have extended beyond research outcomes. In a broader sense, I feel that receiving such a prestigious award has provided a huge boost to my career

prospects and has played an important role in helping me secure a nationally competitive Fellowship.

The wonderful experience facilitated by this award compelled me to become more actively involved with ASMR, first as a member of the NSW State Committee in 2012 and now as a Director of the ASMR Board in 2013. I genuinely believe that the opportunities provided to me through the ASMR Research Award have propelled my career and my development as a scientist.

Dr Dan Johnstone,
ASMR Director



New ASMR director
Dr Dan Johnson.

The ASMR Research Awards are made possible by the generosity of ASMR members who make donations to the ASMR Research Fund. The ASMR Research Fund was established by ASMR with the sole purpose of providing research awards to ASMR members, in particular early career members.

For more information, and to donate visit asmr.org.au/Researchfund.html

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Contact details from www.asmr.org.au/Statebranch.html

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