SPRING 2011

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7  FLOREY TALENT AWARDED

MEET TONY AND TONY – TWO MELBURNIANS DETERMINED TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF THOSE LIVING WITH HUNTINGTON’S DISEASE.

THE FLOREY WELCOMES THE HUNTINGTON’S DISEASE CONGRESS TO MELBOURNE.

(CONTINUED PAGE 3)
Dear friends and colleagues,

I often describe the science labs in Parkville as the engine room of discovery. It’s at the lab benches that occasional and precious small miracles occur leading to scientific victories too exciting to describe.

A few weeks ago, I heard one of our young female scientists, Dr Emma Burrows, explain the feeling when she rises from her desk to return to the lab – to see how an experiment has turned-out. She told us how she was sometimes so excited that she ran up the stairs, two at a time, heart pounding, desperate to reach the lab.

It’s this sort of passion that makes me proud to lead an organisation like the Florey.

When we think of great Australian female scientists, a few quickly spring to mind - Suzanne Cory at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, Priscilla Kincaid Smith at the Royal Melbourne Hospital and Nobel Prize winner, Elizabeth Blackburn.

Fifty per cent of our senior scientists should be women but, in a trend reflected across the country, the Florey loses its women scientists around the time they choose to have children. And this is despite some 67 per cent of our Honours and PhD students being female.

As you may know, early researchers need to produce compelling results to win those first NHMRC grants. But how can our female scientists compete when motherhood calls them away from the lab? In the first of several initiatives, we have established a gender equity in science committee and family rooms in our established buildings for breast-feeding and temporary childcare.

As well, I want to provide some security for our outstanding women scientists. I would like to invite you to help me set-up:

- a fellowship to provide salary support and security for new mothers
- funding to employ a research assistant to keep a scientist’s work going in her absence.

Please take this opportunity to help us retain our women scientists by donating today. For more information, please see page 4.

Prof Geoffrey Donnan,
Director, Florey Neuroscience Institutes

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**BRINGING YOUR PAST INTO OUR FUTURE!**

Since the amalgamation of the Howard Florey Institute, the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Institute three years ago, the Florey has lost contact with many past researchers, students, staff, board and committee members, scattered over Australia and overseas. We want to change that sorry state of affairs, but we need your help.

If you can dig up any old photographs or other memorabilia of your time with us, we would love to add your items to our archive. We will feature them in our newsletter and on the website - they are bound to be good for a chuckle or two over the years ahead. Similarly, if you know the whereabouts of past colleagues, please tell us so that we may contact them.

One such immediate past colleague is Ruston Barlow, laboratory manager of the Howard Florey Institute for 39 years, who retired last month after keeping the labs running smoothly for all that time. Many of our readers will remember Ruston as he appears in this photograph, even though he looked a little different at his farewell function. Tempus fugit!

If you would like to reconnect with the Florey, please contact John Macdonald on 9035 8624 or email john.macdonald@florey.edu.au

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**BRAIN POWER**

**THE 15TH KENNETH B MYER LECTURE**

Professor David Attwell is a world expert in how our thinking is supported by electrical signals, and how these signals can fail in brain disease. His powerful talk ‘Brain Power’ will focus on this exciting area.

“The idea that our thoughts are mediated by electricity has been around since Michelangelo painted God passing the spark of life into Adam on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Like a computer, our brains use electricity to think, but also like a computer they need a power supply to work,” said Professor Attwell. “When the power is cut off, as happens in stroke or heart attack, the brain will be damaged.”

The lecture is named in the memory of Kenneth B Myer, one of the founding benefactors of the Howard Florey Institute. Since 1992, the Florey has invited internationally distinguished scientists to speak to the Melbourne community as part of this public lecture series.

The Kenneth Myer Lecture is a free event, and if you are interested in brain research we invite you to join us. Please register your details online at www.florey.edu.au and we will post your invitation. Alternatively, call Jade Sarna on (03) 8344 1888 to book – or post the form on the back page.

6pm, Tuesday October 4 at Plenary Hall, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre
INSPIRING DAYS FOR HUNTINGTON’S RESEARCH

The Florey Neuroscience Institutes welcomes the Huntington’s Disease World Congress to Melbourne in September. This unique conference brings together researchers, clinicians, carers and families who share the latest in the fight against this crippling genetic disorder.

Having inherited the Huntington’s disease gene from his father, restaurant owner Tony is driven to help researchers like Associate Professor Anthony Hannan to find a cure. Tony will sit on a panel at the congress running from September 11 to 14, giving a community perspective on life with the gene.

And for researchers like Anthony who helped bid for the congress to come to Melbourne, there is no greater motivator than to mix with patients and families who live with the disease every day.

“To meet people like Tony is utterly inspirational,” Anthony says. “The people in my lab and I are passionate about our research and to be face-to-face with people you might help is very inspiring.”

Some of the best Huntington’s researchers in the world will be in Melbourne, sharing their latest results with colleagues. In the evenings, lay people, families and carers will receive a briefing of the day’s progress – without the scientific jargon.

As Tony says: “One of the things the research can provide us is a sense of control.”

Huntington’s is an inherited single-gene abnormality that causes specific neurons in the brain to become dysfunctional and eventually die. The condition involves cognitive deficits culminating in dementia, psychiatric symptoms like depression and movement disorders.

Tony has been particularly heartened by Anthony’s recent work as it reinforces his own approach to life. He is fit, strong and mentally well thanks to regular exercise, yoga and a healthy diet.

Anthony’s research has shown that physical exercise and mental activity are good for the brain and may build a “reserve” to assist those who are asymptomatic.

Anthony’s lab has previously shown that increased mental and physical activity can delay onset of Huntington’s in mice.
Dr Holly Cate and Dr Emma Burrows are two young women on a mission. Each one is going through a specific time of transition: Emma is starting her post-doctoral career and Holly is expecting her second child. Doesn’t sound so unusual for normal, intelligent young women. Well, either of these situations has the potential to completely derail the careers of these two – and other Australian female scientists.

Emma: “I was raised with two brothers in a gender neutral home, and it never crossed my mind that I wouldn’t be able to succeed in a field due to being a girl. I was a scientist from an early age. My early experiments involved classifying pond water creatures in overflowing Tupperware containers in the kitchen and dissecting dead birds I found in the garden.

“These days, my work focuses more on autism and schizophrenia, and since completing my PhD I’ve been working with Professor Tony Hannan at the Florey. Within the next year I plan to move overseas to take on further research and enhance my technical skills, but I will definitely want to come back to Australia. The question is – will I get funding?”

Holly: “I have always loved science, but it just doesn’t stop! Like a 24 hour news channel, you look away for just a minute and you might miss something, something that can change the whole direction of your research. Science is fast paced, exciting, challenging, and I am fortunate to be able to pursue my passion.

“When I found out I was expecting my first child I thought it might be the end of my career – babies and long working hours are mutually incompatible. Luckily, a philanthropic angel stepped in and funded a research assistant to carry out my experiments until I was able to return to work. Now that I am pregnant again, I worry that my absence will create a break in my publications. That might mean I will be forced to leave the work I love.”

Some 67 per cent of the Florey’s Honours and PhD students are women, and half the post-docs are women. However, at the Parkville campus where most of our basic science is carried out, there is not one female senior research fellow. This situation is repeated in scientific institutions right across Australia.

It’s such a waste of talent and training when we see women quit science because their progression to senior levels is hampered by a hiatus in their laboratory work and publication rate. We need to keep these women in their labs – or offer support so their work continues when they’re home with babies.

The Florey is establishing an endowment to create a special fellowship for a senior female scientist and awards to fund a research assistant for senior scientists on maternity leave. This ground-breaking venture has been launched by truly visionary gifts from two remarkable Melbourne women, each with a passion for science and for nurturing tomorrow’s leaders. Will you join us?

If you would like to support the Women in Science Endowment, please have a chat with our Community Engagement & Fundraising Manager Astrid Sweres on (03) 8344 1629. All gifts will be invested in the Florey Foundation, and both the Fellowship and Award will be funded in perpetuity by the income from these gifts.
STROKE CARE FOR YOUNG AND OLD

Starting exercise and getting out of bed within 24 hours of a stroke may be the difference between walking again – or not, according to an international trial. The AVERT (Very Early Rehabilitation Trial) is being conducted from the Florey Neuroscience Institutes in Heidelberg.

Two members of the AVERT trial, Ron Wilson, 96, and Sharnie Redmond, 24, recently met with the director of the trial, Associate Professor Julie Bernhardt.

Sharnie, from Yarrambat, was playing basketball four years ago when she felt as though “someone was pouring an icy slushee into my head”. The piercing headache was severe but momentary. A first-aid officer recognised the symptoms of a stroke and called an ambulance. Sharnie was delivered to the Austin within an hour and early treatment began.

Doncaster gentleman Ron Wilson arrived at the Epworth in Richmond back in late May within hours of experiencing stroke symptoms. Ron is now back to his old self, walking and driving again. Ron, a former teacher and his wife Roma, 91, have been married for 69 years and value their independence. The early intervention means they can continue living with minimal support – in fact they receive home help just once a fortnight.

Previous research by Associate Professor Julie Bernhardt found that early exercise can improve independent walking. The study found that 50% of people who start exercise early are back on their feet within three days, unlike those who take longer to start exercising. The cost saving was estimated to be approximately $8000 per patient thanks to shorter rehabilitation.

The AVERT team at the Florey is celebrating its 1000th recruit. The trial, funded by a grant from the National Health and Medical Research Council, now involves 600 nurses and therapists and runs in 40 hospitals in five countries - Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia and the UK. “We have known for some time that exercise-based rehabilitation is suitable for most people affected by stroke, regardless of age,” says Assoc Prof Julie Bernhardt, the trial’s director. “At the end of AVERT we want to prove it’s never too soon to start exercise after a stroke.”

The trial will be complete when 2000 patients have been recruited. To be eligible, people need to reach a participating hospital within 24 hours of having a stroke.

Six Melbourne hospitals are involved – the Epworth, Austin, Royal Melbourne, the Alfred, Western and at Frankston. Warrnambool and Geelong hospitals offer the trial to country Victorians. Follow-up for patients continues for 12 months post-stroke.

Sharnie has since had surgery to mend a small hole in her heart responsible for a clot that caused her stroke and Ron is once again able to enjoy drives to Sugarloaf Reservoir with his beloved Roma.

The AVERT team is waiting to hear if its NHMRC funding will continue so the 10 year trial can be completed over the next five years.
The second of the Florey’s new buildings has opened for business in Parkville with scientists moving into their brand new, purpose-built laboratories.

Pictured here are members of Associate Professor Steve Petrou’s epilepsy lab. This team was the first to make the move into the Parkville building. While the shelves are already cluttered with glass, plastic and metal equipment, natural light pours into the spacious labs featuring the latest equipment and a five-star energy rating.

The Florey staff are working side-by-side with colleagues from the University of Melbourne and the Mental Health Research Institute. Some 700 people are now striving to improve the lives of those affected by brain disorders – up to one in five Australians.

The opportunities to collaborate are better than ever with stroke researchers clustered together - as are those seeking answers to other major disorders including MS, Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s and addiction.

ORANGES AND TOMATOES MAY HOLD A SECRET

For those who survive a coronary, there is a very real risk of ongoing poor health due to the damage done to heart tissue and from the progression to heart failure.

Following a heart attack, the primary aim of doctors is to remove the blockage in the coronary artery to minimise damage to the tissue downstream of the blockage, but paradoxically when this is done, reperfusion with oxygen rich blood also causes death of cells in the tissue. This is called reperfusion injury.

For 10 years, Florey scientists have been working on ways to prevent reperfusion injury, and therefore save heart tissue. Such a treatment would reduce the 20% of patients who go on to develop heart failure after a heart attack.

It is not generally known that the five-year survival rate for those with heart failure is worse than for those living with a range of cancers.

As well, heart failure is very hard to manage and is extremely expensive for the health system.

According to the Florey’s A/Prof Clive May, very promising findings have emerged using a flavonol that is a highly potent antioxidant, and is found in fruit and vegetables. The findings are a result of studies by Dr Colleen Thomas and of a collaboration with former University of Melbourne pharmacologist Prof Owen Woodman. They potentially promise new drug therapies for a range of conditions including myocardial infarction and eventually, perhaps, stroke.

A/Prof May heads the Neurocardiovascular lab in the Neurophysiology division.

“We found that this flavonol significantly reduced the amount of heart tissue damaged following occlusion of a coronary artery and reperfusion. Importantly this compound has multiple actions. In addition to being an antioxidant, it reduces calcium entry into cells, reduces inflammation and has specific actions stimulating survival pathways inside heart cells.”

The Florey started working with the Bio21 Institute some 5 years ago to overcome the flavonol’s insolubility that prevented intravenous injection. Enter the Florey’s Professor Bevyn Jarrott. This experienced pharmacologist and pharmacist helped design an injectable drug that “carries” the insoluble flavonol into the body before an enzyme breaks-off a side arm releasing the drug that travels to the heart.

“Many other drugs have been trialed in an attempt to limit reperfusion injuries but all have been unsuccessful,” said A/Prof May. “We hope that the multiple actions of this compound, together with its ability to rapidly enter heart cells means that it will translate to clinical use.”

The scope for a commercial market is huge.

The Florey hopes the discovery of this highly potent flavonol leads to other applications – particularly to help patients who have had a stroke.

Phase one and two human clinical trials will begin in the near future.
Forget Cadel! Intrepid cyclist Kieran Donlon left Cairns on September 1 on the first leg of his epic ride to raise money for the Florey's research into Parkinson’s disease. He is planning to arrive back in his hometown of Warrnambool in South Western Victoria on Sunday September 25.

Along the way, Kieran will travel all the way down the tropical east coast of Queensland and NSW to Sydney, and then head inland down the Hume Highway back to the lights of Melbourne.

If you’d like to help cheer-along Victoria’s other cycling legend on his last legs (and that may well be true by then!), he will be riding down Royal Parade past the Florey’s new Parkville building on the afternoon of Friday 23 September. Why not come and join our scientists and a host of other supporters as we give him a hero’s welcome around 2pm!

Updates on Kieran’s progress will be posted daily on our website www.florey.edu.au, so be sure and check-in for his roadie’s blog.

Gifts to help Kieran achieve his visionary goal can be made through any branch of the Bendigo Bank or direct to the Florey, either by phone on (03) 8344 1833 or on-line at http://www.florey.edu.au/support-florey/give-online.

VICTORIA’S OTHER CYCLING LEGEND

Bethlehem Griffiths Research Foundation Awards

Dr David Nisbet, a brilliant young Florey scientist who has developed an innovative bioengineering solution to repair brain damage, has won the Bethlehem Griffiths Research Foundation 2011 Young Researcher of the Year Award. He recently celebrated with Foundation Medal winner Professor Stephen Davis (r) and Florey Deputy Director Professor Mal Horne (c).

Dr Nisbet is developing scaffolding materials to aid neuronal development in Parkinson’s disease, but his research could eventually have wide applications for a range of degenerative neurological disorders and traumatic spinal cord injuries.

“The collaboration of engineers and biologists is only just beginning. There are likely to be astonishing breakthroughs over the next 10 to 15 years, and I am thrilled to be able to contribute,” Dr Nisbet says.

Professor Davis is internationally recognised for his work in clinical trials and the use of neuro-imaging in the selection of acute stroke treatments. He stressed the collaborative nature of research, paying special tribute to Florey Director Professor Geoffrey Donnan, his research partner and friend over the last 30 years.

The Bethlehem Griffiths Research Foundation Medal honours outstanding contribution to clinical research in progressive neurological disorders, stroke or palliative care. Past winners have included the cream of Australia’s research community such as Professors Ian Maddocks, Claude Bernard, Frederick Mendelsohn, Colin Masters, Geoffrey Donnan, Sam Berkovic and Philip Beart.

The Foundation introduced the Young Researcher Award, which also includes $5,000 for research related travel, to celebrate our best and brightest at a time when such recognition can do much to encourage mid-career scientists.

THEY WERE UP FOR A CHALLENGE

In the Florey’s 2011 Brain Fitness Challenge, teams were created, wits and mental agility were tested, and funds were raised for brain research.

This annual fundraiser for the Florey asks competitors to sign-up in advance and seek sponsorship prior to the Challenge being rolled out over seven days.

The Trust Company continued its support as premier partner in 2011 with a grant of $25,000, and we are happy to announce that $76,750 was raised by our wonderful supporters.

This year, a fundraising battle took place between teams from Tasmania and NSW with Tas Gas Networks securing the trophy for raising the most team funds and Darren Leishman from The Trust Company in Sydney raising the most individual funds. Darren also led his team – The Brains Trust Sydney – to point scoring victory!

Of the 235 players, just 14 finished with a perfect score and will be inducted into the “Top Cog” hall of fame.

We thank The Trust Company and our principal partner, Australian Institute of Management, Victoria and Tasmania, as well as our long-term partner, LEK Consulting. Their much-valued support ensures we are able to promote and run the growing Brain Fitness Challenge. Roll on, Challenge 2012!
THANK YOU TO THOSE WHO HAVE GENEROUSLY GIVEN TO THE FLOREY NEUROSCIENCE INSTITUTES BETWEEN JUNE AND AUGUST 2011. LISTED ARE THOSE WHO KINDLY GAVE $750 OR MORE.

Andrew Abercrombie • Charles Allen AO • Bell Charitable Fund • Graeme Bowker • The Hon Justice Alex Chernov AO QC • Diana Cherry • Charles Clark • J Geoff Donaldson • Dowd Foundation • K & M Doyle • The Drummond Foundation • The Marian & E H Flack Trust • Neilma Gantrner • Peter Gilbertson • Louise Gourlay OAM • Richard Harbig • Margaret Jackson AC • H & K Johnston Family Foundation • Mark Jones • Professor Anne Kelso AO • Elisabeth Lord • Professor Frederick Mendelsohn AO • Graeme & Audrey Moir • The Myer Foundation • Sid & Fiona Myer Family Foundation • Dr Mark Nelson • Lois E Oliver • Judith Overbeek • Pierce Armstrong Foundation • Ian Renard • Estate of L I Roach • Gertrude Silberberg • Susan Silberberg • Nell & Hermon Slade Trust • Gary Stillano • Gregory Taggart • Peter & Lindy White Foundation Pty Ltd • Professor James Wiley • The Yulgilbar Foundation

IN MEMORIAM. We greatly appreciate all the gifts we have received in memory of loved ones. Those remembered here are: Andrew Armstrong, Pamela Beale, Grahame Bennett, Nathan Black, Shamus Liptrot, Thomas Wilcox.

KEY DATES

SEPTEMBER
1-25TH: PEDALLING FOR PARKINSON’S
Kieran Donlon will be cycling from Cairns to Warrnambool to raise funds for the Florey’s research into Parkinson’s disease. To help Kieran realise his dream please call Margit Simondson on 03 8344 1833 or email margit.simondson@florey.edu.au

11-14TH: WORLD CONGRESS ON HUNTINGTON’S DISEASE
The Congress will be held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, featuring family and community involvement. Those wishing to register for the IHA Family Day, please contact Glen Johnson at Huntington’s Victoria on 03 9818 6333 or email g.johnson@huntingtonsvic.org.

OCTOBER
4TH: KENNETH B MYER LECTURE
Presented by Professor David Attwell, the lecture will be held in the Plenary at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre at 6pm. Bookings essential. Contact jade.sarna@florey.edu.au or register online www.florey.edu.au

5-6TH: MELBOURNE BRAIN SYMPOSIUM
The Melbourne Brain Symposium is an annual two day event bringing together world leading neuroscientists to highlight recent advances in basic and disease related neuro-research. This year, the symposium will be held at the new Melbourne Brain Centre in Parkville.

NOVEMBER
12TH: SUSIE HARRIS MEMORIAL FUND ANNUAL BALL
The Annual Gala ball returns to the Members Dining Room at the MCC to raise money and awareness for Motor Neurone Disease. For more information visit www.susieharrismemorialfund.org

For more information contact the Editor, Amanda Place: amanda.place@florey.edu.au +613 8344 1568 www.florey.edu.au

Find us on Twitter and Facebook at our website: florey.edu.au

Florey Neuroscience Institutes is the amalgamation of the Howard Florey Institute, the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute.

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