SPRING 2012

COME AND HEAR BILL BRYSON AT HIS BEST: LAUGH OUT LOUD FOR THE FLOREY
Dear friends of the Florey,

Well, the last few months have certainly been a time of enormous change and growth for the Florey. Not only have two of our scientists won prestigious grants, a senior scientist been a finalist for a significant national award, we have a new name, Board and a dynamic new chairman to lead us into a time of unprecedented growth.

But first to the science. One of our most senior scientists, Professor Julie Bernhardt, recently won a prestigious Churchill Fellowship. Julie plans to investigate stroke-related disability and the power of an enriched environment on recovery in Sweden, Spain, USA and Canada before returning to our Austin campus.

As well, two of our researchers have won Future Fellowships from the Australian Research Council. Dr Mathias Dutschmann is developing an understanding of the brain mechanisms associated with breathing during speech and swallowing. Dr Ben Gu is investigating how an inherited variation in two proteins of the brain can predispose us to a range of neurodegenerative diseases. The aim of Future Fellowships is to attract and retain the best and brightest mid-career researchers. I am very proud that the Florey offers such a supportive environment and that we are able to attract and retain the very best.

In the last edition of Brain Matters, we farewelled Charles Allen, our previous Board Chairman. As you know, Charles has made an enormous contribution to the Florey and will be sorely missed. Last I heard Charles and his wife, Jocelyn, were searching for the northern lights on a fascinating Icelandic cruise. We will always be grateful to Charles for his calm and level-headed leadership of the Florey and his generous financial support.

Now that we have bedded down the merger with the Mental Health Research Institute, the Florey adds another synapse to its neurological profile. One in five Australians will experience the debilitating and at times life-threatening effects of mental illness. Understanding the causes of these illnesses, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression is a major priority for us.

Finally, I would like to welcome our new Chairman, Harold Mitchell, AC, who is set to take us into an exciting new era of brain research. He has already set an exciting agenda and has impressed all of us with his vision and vigour.

Warm regards,

Prof Geoffrey Donnan, AO
Director, Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health

PS Our new name The Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health is a bit of a mouthful. I suspect we’ll soon be known simply as ‘The Florey’.

I was recently quoted in The Sunday Herald Sun as saying that within the next 30 years, Melbourne should have provided a scientific incubator in which we have produced 10 Nobel Prize winners!

I am a person who believes in making things happen. And as the Chairman of the Florey’s new Board, I hope to help drive this great organisation in a determined and clear direction. Nobel Prizes may be hard to come by, but powerful scientific discoveries are within reach. And these discoveries can change lives.

So how can we help the scientists to do their great work? We need to import great researchers as well as nurture and retain our own enormously talented neuroscientists. We need to provide that incubator that offers security and excitement.

Since joining the Florey recently, I have been blown away by the magnificent facilities and the great young minds at work in both Parkville and Heidelberg. These young scientists are mentored by seasoned professionals who have been in this business for decades. I consider these people to be heroes. They are working for the greater good of humankind – to help alleviate suffering of the mind and to find cures for some of the most devastating brain diseases like Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s and epilepsy.

I can think of no greater contribution than to help build the Florey, and with your assistance, to become the world’s neuroscience and mental health research epicentre.

Every one of us has a family member or friend affected by a stroke, depression, an addiction or perhaps an age-related degenerative brain disease.

Please help us to continue this great work. I know I will be giving it my best shot. Will you help me?

I’d be interested to hear your thoughts or to discuss a donation. Please write to me: harold.mitchell@florey.edu.au

Mr Harold Mitchell, AC
Chairman, Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health
BILL BRYSON COMES TO THE FLOREY!

Renowned author, science communicator, traveller and all-round likeable guy, Bill Bryson is coming to Melbourne – and you can hear him speak in a rare free public appearance.

Bill will deliver the Florey’s renowned Kenneth B. Myer Lecture on October 31 at the Melbourne Town Hall. His lecture will be titled, “An Even Shorter History of Nearly Everything”, based on his book of a similar name.

“I’ll be talking about the most important and remarkable - and generally under-appreciated - things I learned about science while researching my book,” Bill says. “I will certainly talk about the wonders of the human brain… within the context of a wider, more general talk.”

Bill’s books have sold more than 10 million copies and have been translated into over 45 languages. His science book A Short History of Nearly Everything won the 2005 Aventis Prize of the Royal Society and the Descartes Prize, the European Union’s highest literary award.

His other books include Notes from a Small Island, A Walk in the Woods, Down Under, The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid, and even a biography of William Shakespeare.

Bill has led an amazing life. He was Chancellor of the University of Durham from 2005-2011, and has been president of the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

In 2006 he was awarded an Order of the British Empire by the British government and the President’s Prize by Britain’s Royal Society of Chemistry. He is an honorary fellow of the Kavli Institute of Particle Physics at the University of California and the British Science Association.

Living in Australia, it’s hard for us to imagine that a Royal Society could be 350 years-old, but Bill’s an honorary fellow of the extremely well-established British Royal Society of Chemistry.

Though Bill was born in Des Moines, Iowa, he has spent much of his adult life in England and lives in Norfolk with his English wife, Cynthia, who will be coming with him to Melbourne.

The Kenneth B Myer Lecture takes place every year, and commemorates Ken’s contribution to biomedical research, overwhelming quest for knowledge and love for life.

Would you like to contribute to the Bryson Travel Scholarship? This scholarship will take our brightest neuroscientists to the world. We know they will come home enriched by the latest international research into the human brain. Help us make it happen.

We will gratefully accept donations on the night. Or feel free to visit the homepage of www.florey.edu.au

Bill Bryson will also be ‘in conversation’ with the ABC’s Richard Fidler on October 30. In an exclusive dinner event at the delicious Zinc in Federation Square, the Thunderbolt Kid will reflect on his life and mull over a range of topics to be discovered on the night. Tickets $250 each or $2400 for a table of 10. Contact Margit Simondson margit.simondson@florey.edu.au or call (03) 8344 9679.

WHERE
Melbourne Town Hall
WHEN
6pm (doors open at 5.30).
FREE, but please register online at florey.edu.au.
Bill’s books will be for sale: Readings will be in the foyer.

Readings
We have come a long way from the ice baths, shackles, straight jackets, and psychosurgery that constituted “care” in mental health until the 1950s.

Research has transformed the lives of many people suffering from mental illness by producing a variety of medications and psychological therapies to help them cope. However, current treatments are still not ideal, and none are cures.

Research into psychiatric illnesses such as depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder have been the bread and butter of the Mental Health Research Institute, which, recently merged with the Florey Neuroscience Institutes. The team also runs internationally recognised research programs in neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease. This research will continue and strengthen within the new entity known as the Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health.

NEURODEGENERATIVE ILLNESS RESEARCH

In Professor Ashley Bush’s oxidation biology laboratory, research focuses on dementia including Alzheimer’s disease and other neurodegenerative illnesses. It examines three major themes in the search for new therapies:

- Oxidative stress in neurological disorders;
- The molecular and cellular basis of neurotoxicity associated with the deposition of aggregating proteins in neurodegenerative disorders;
- Understanding the interactions between cellular proteins and biologically important metals.

Researchers in this lab have proved that the hallmark proteins associated with Alzheimer’s disease influence the import and export of the vital nutrient metals - copper, zinc and iron - within the brain. Even a subtle imbalance in the normally tight regulation of these metals (resulting from age or disease-related changes) can permit these proteins to interact abnormally.

Professor Ashley Bush, recently short-listed for the $80,000 GlaxoSmithKline Award for Research Excellence.
They have also made an exciting new finding, which has significant implications for the treatment of depression. Catecholamines are important hormones which regulate aspects of brain function such as mood, attention and muscle tone. Low levels of catecholamines in various parts of the brain contribute to depression, and anti-depressants work by elevating levels of specific catecholamines in the brain.

The new finding concerns the function of beta-amyloid protein precursor, which is also implicated in Alzheimer’s disease. The team found that this enzyme controls the loss of catecholamines in the brain, blood and other organs. This discovery creates a new target for drugs that could aid tens of millions of people suffering from depression, and anti-depressants work by elevating levels of specific catecholamines in the brain.

The group also investigates the potential of the enzyme’s role in schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, conditions where levels of brain catecholamines may be elevated.

MOLECULAR PATHOLOGY OF PSYCHOTIC DISORDERS

In the molecular psychopharmacology laboratory and at the Northern Psychiatry Research Centre, laboratory head Associate Professor Suresh Sundram’s team works to understand the molecular pathology of psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression. The aim is to develop better and more effective markers and interventions by investigating how psychotropic medications and drugs interact with receptors and intracellular signalling mechanisms in neurons.

The centre collects clinical material and biological samples that can be examined in the laboratory to better understand these disorders. The knowledge gained from this work will lead to the development of new treatments and bio markers to aid diagnosis. This work is supported by beyondblue.

SCHIZOPHRENIA, BIPOLAR DISORDER AND MAJOR DEPRESSIVE DISORDERS RESEARCH

The molecular psychiatry laboratory, headed by Professor Brian Dean, researches the causes of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depressive disorders, as well as how the drugs used to treat these conditions work.

Understanding the causes of these common conditions is the first step to rationale-based drug design, needed to develop better treatments for psychiatric disorders of many kinds. This research will also ensure we understand how current drugs work, and separate the actions of drugs that reduce symptoms from those causing unwanted side-effects.

FAST FACTS

- Half of Australia’s population will suffer mental illness in their lifetime.
- Two thirds of these people will not receive treatment, and of these there are about 750,000 young people who have a mental health problem but no access to treatment.
- Up to 12 per cent of people affected by mental Illness take their own lives, compared with an average suicide rate of 1.7 per cent of the wider population.
- The highest rate of psychiatric illness occurs in 18-35 year olds.
- Five of the world’s 10 leading causes of disability are related to mental illness.
- Predictions suggest the share of global disease burden related to mental illnesses will grow rapidly in the coming decades and will almost double by the year 2020, rising to almost 15 per cent of the total burden of disease.
GOODBYE...

The Florey’s indefatigable group director of Fundraising and Marketing, Jenni Elliott, has announced her retirement at the end of October.

Jenni and her husband Rick have purchased a property in Florida, USA, where they look forward to indulging their new granddaughter, playing golf and enjoying the sunshine.

Jenni came to the Florey from Sydney’s Garvan Institute in 2008 and, in her four years with the Florey, has led her team with enthusiastic energy to achieve some significant goals. Jenni was a crucial player in the successful bid for the final $40 million federal funding of the Florey’s new laboratories. She has directed the team that has raised 10-12 per cent of the Florey’s annual income while raising the profile of the Florey in the community.

Jenni will handover the reins to Ross Johnstone who has been with the Mental Health Research Institute for many years. We wish her a fond farewell.

...AND HELLO

Ross Johnstone is an experienced fundraiser and marketer.

In his most recent role as the manager of Development and Communications at the Mental Health Research Institute, Ross has built the donor database to become a major fundraising tool and has raised millions of dollars to fund the Institute’s research.

Prior to this role, Ross was the director of Marketing and Communications at the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (now Vision Australia) where he was responsible for Carols by Candlelight, one of the most significant fundraising events in Australia.

Ross looks forward to meeting more friends of the Florey, donors and bequestors as he endeavours to support research programs at the Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health.

THE TRUST COMPANY TRIUMPHS AGAIN

Once again, a team fielded by The Trust Company has scooped the pool in the 2012 Brain Fitness Challenge.

The Brain Fitness Challenge is a seven-day online competition. It engages teams of bright minds from some of the biggest companies in the country. Each team’s collective brain power challenges those working at other businesses.

Top point scoring team with 3,910 out of a possible 4,000 points was The Brains Trust, Sydney, closely followed by their New Zealand colleagues.

Team leader Darren Leishman raised the most funds individually and the team also took-out poll position for its fundraising efforts.

Eight participants achieved perfect scores to become “Top Cogs” – Justin Burmeister, Darren Leishman and Andrew Page from The Brains Trust, Sydney, Claire Bennett, Emmett Sutton, Matt Hart and Simon Sherpa from The Brains Trust NZ (both from The Trust Company) and Linda Lan from The New Direction (Bank of America Merrill Lynch).

Congratulations to all the very fit brains in this year’s Challenge – you did a great job and almost $50,000 was raised to support our scientists in their quest to cure brain disorders and diseases. Thank you for your participation and your support!
Warrnambool cyclist extraordinaire Kieran Donlon recently completed his second major fundraiser for the Florey’s research into Parkinson’s disease at a 24-hour, non-stop ride.

Undeterred by Victoria’s coldest and wettest winter for 10 years, Kieran and his extended family brought the first sunny days of spring to Melbourne’s Albert Park Lake circuit. His extraordinary plan was to ride around the lake for 24 hours, starting at 4pm on Saturday and riding through the night until 4pm the following Sunday afternoon.

Accompanied intermittently by his brothers Michael and Adrian, and cheered on by sisters Maryanne and Kath, their families and a group of supporters, Kieran rode a staggering 538 kilometres (101 full laps) during this feat of endurance. Only stopping for nature breaks and to grab a banana or a toasted sandwich for sustenance as he cycled, our Parkinson’s hero fulfilled the goal he set for himself….and even drove himself home afterwards.

‘This was the trial for what I hope will become an annual event as part of Parkinson’s Awareness Week in September. I needed to see if I could do it, and how hard it would be to get other cyclists riding with me,’ says Kieran.

‘I reckon now that I’ve proved it’s possible, we can get others involved to really raise some serious money for the Florey’s research into Parkinson’s disease. I want to see $1 million minimum by this time next year!’


Prior to going to print, Adrian Donlon died unexpectedly. The Florey family sends its sincere condolences to the Donlon clan.
THANK YOU

...TO THOSE WHO HAVE GENEROUSLY GIVEN TO THE FLOREY BETWEEN JUNE AND AUGUST 2012. LISTED ARE THOSE WHO KINDLY GAVE $500 OR MORE.

Andrew Abercrombie • Joan Adler • Michael Aitken • Charles Allen AO • ANZ Banking Group Limited • Robert & Pauline Atkins • David Barkley • Simon Barrett • Tony Beddson AO • Sandra Benjamin OAM • Mahalia Brown • Edward & Diana Cherry • Charles Clark • Faye Clarke • Robert Clarke • John Collingwood • Bruce Corlett • Peter Coughlan • June Danks • J Geoff Donaldson • Carl & Wendy Dowd • Sir Edward Dunlop Medical Research Foundation • East Family Trust • Alma Hazel Eddy Trust • Michael & Adrienne Edgar • Elly Findlay • Neilma Gantner • Peter & Janet Gilbertson • Andrea Goldsmith • Louise Gourlay OAM • Ian Goy • Geoff & Helen Handbury Foundation • David & Margaret Harper • Patrick Hayden • Human Variome Project International Limited • Campbell & Caroline Johnston • H & K Johnston Family Foundation • Anne Kantor • Anne Kelso AO • Janice Kesterton • Law Comfort • Brian Little • Paul Little AO • Margaret Livermore • Elisabeth Lord • Mary Lupton • Scobie & Claire MacKinnon Trust • Heather Mason • Craig & Miranda McGree • Beris McKemmish • Alexander McMillan • John Milne • Graeme & Audrey Moir • Arthur Morton • John & June Nixon-Smith • Sue O’Neill • Judith Overbeek • Perpetual Trustees Australia Ltd • Pierce Armstrong Foundation • Estate of L I Roach • Martin & Valerie Sachs • Donald Sanders AO • Robert & Elisabeth Sinclair • Greg & Nicholas Soloway • Yvonne Spencer • Surf Coast News Australia Pty Ltd • Estate of the late Gabriella Szokolyai • Bill Vlahos • Richard Wall • Peter & Lindy White Foundation Pty Ltd • James Wiley • Karin Wiley • Estate of the late Betty Geddes Wood • Harrison Youngy

IN MEMORIAM. We greatly appreciate all the gifts we have received in memory of loved ones. Those remembered here are: Tyler James Bridge, Jenny Coughlan, Ron Fallow, Matthew Hilcoat, Samuel & Benjamin Holland, Michael Kloster, Josephine Roberts, Norman Robinson, Sarah Wallace.

GIFTS IN RECOGNITION. Cathy Foster for her 60th birthday.

KEY DATES AND OTHER NEWS

BILL BRYSON IN MELBOURNE

Bill Bryson comes to Melbourne for two events:

  Dinner at Zinc in Federation Square, $250 a ticket or $2400 table of 10. Enquiries: Amanda on 0411 204 526.
- OCTOBER 31: The 16th Kenneth Myer Lecture – free
  A very special lecture led by the charming science nerd Bill Bryson – 6pm at the Melbourne Town Hall. Enquiries: Margot on (03) 8344 9679.

THE HUNTINGTON’S DISEASE CHARITY GALA BALL, BRIGHTON

OCTOBER 12
Enquiries: Jess Wood 0412 216 793.

MS RESEARCH GALA BALL, DOCKLANDS

OCTOBER 20
Enquiries: Louise on 0433 681 819.

MELBOURNE BRAIN SYMPOSIUM, MELBOURNE BRAIN CENTRE

NOVEMBER 1, 9AM-5PM
A meeting for Melbourne’s neuroscientific research community.
Melbourne Brain Centre auditorium, Parkville campus
Enquiries: email j.standish@mhri.edu.au

CHANGING HER BRAIN

NOVEMBER 19, 6.30-7.30PM – FREE
Pioneering writer, Barbara Arrowsmith-Young author of The woman who changed her brain is visiting as a guest of Readings books:
Melbourne Brain Centre auditorium, Parkville campus
Florey.edu.au

PARKINSON’S LECTURE

DECEMBER 6, 6.30-7.30PM – FREE
Professor Malcolm Horne
Exploring treatment and research options
Melbourne Brain Centre auditorium, Parkville campus
Florey.edu.au

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The Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health is the amalgamation of the Howard Florey Institute, the Brain Research Institute, The Mental Health Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute.

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