

ALUMNI

MAGAZINE 2019



Flinders
UNIVERSITY

College of Medicine
& Public Health

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We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands and waters where Flinders University operates – Arrernte, Boandik, Erawirung, Jawoyn, Kurna, Larrakia, Ngarrindjeri, Ngadjuri, Peramangk, Ramindjeri, Warumungu and Yolngu – and honour their Elders past and present.

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Kicking goals in dual careers

Standing at 183 centimetres, Adelaide Crows AFLW ruck Jessica Foley is not your average doctor by any measure. Whilst physicians usually patrol the sidelines with their medical bag, Dr Foley prefers to influence the final score.



The 35-year-old is a former basketballer, dual Halls Medallist and Adelaide Lightning Captain, who has balanced the demands of elite sport with study, gaining a Master of Science (Groundwater Hydrology) in 2012 and a Doctor of Medicine in 2016 from Flinders University.

She recently made the switch to footy and goes by the nickname 'Scrubs', affectionately bestowed by team mates.

Dr Foley was drafted to the Adelaide Crows for the 2019 AFLW season after a standout 2018 season with Sturt Football Club.

She's become an integral part of the Crows side, but, more impressively, she did it while training as a junior doctor.

"I've worked six months at Noarlunga Medical Centre and two years at Flinders Medical Centre

in various departments. Every day I feel like I learn more from meeting new patients and seeing new presentations. It seems medicine is a limitless place to learn," says Dr Foley, who started her first GP Registrar placement in August and will work part-time through the football season.

"Both footy and medicine provide me with a mental escape from each other. I often feel exhausted after work and dread going to training, but when I arrive I really enjoy myself and my mood lifts immediately.

"I think playing sport has helped me to communicate better with patients and make them feel more informed and comfortable with the treatment we are planning.

"I would like to work as a GP with an interest in sports medicine. I would like to still spend time around sporting teams."

Dr Jessica Foley
(MSc(GwHyd) '12, MD '16)

(Photo: Courtesy
Adelaide Crows AFLW)



The transformative power of education and research

Two recent events gave me cause to reflect on the power of education.

The first was at our recent graduation ceremony, at which I met graduates who had studied at our Bedford Park campus. They came from a range of places – locally, nationally and internationally – during their studies, with many benefiting from placements in rural and remote Australian communities. In turn, as graduates they will practise their skills in a range of varying settings and locations, and pay back the investment they received from our staff many times over in building more healthy communities.



The second event was when a group of 33 graduates from the MD class of 1999 returned to campus recently to enthusiastically celebrate their 20th anniversary of graduation. The group came from country towns and capital cities around Australia and from Taiwan, Canada and Malaysia. It was a privilege to hear their reflections of each other, the course (they were the first year of the graduate program), and their subsequent journeys. The warmth with which they greeted each other and relived their time here was palpable. There was genuine fondness for their old haunts!

This annual magazine – our first edition – sets out to celebrate the achievements, the impact, and the enduring camaraderie that exists within and between the alumni of the College of Medicine and Public Health. On pages 10-11, you'll be able to read more about the Flinders Health and Medical Research Institute which unites all of our research into a single institute, the epicentre of which will be in a new, world-class health research facility being built as part of the Flinders Village.

So when we talk about the power of education, it's not just about it being life-changing for the individual, it's also about the indirect benefits that accrue, to families and to communities, wherever our alumni live and work around the world.

At Flinders, we persistently strive to make a difference to the health of the communities we serve through the transformative power of research, education and health care. In particular, our social vision incorporates improving health equity for those in rural and remote settings, and working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to strengthen the health of the traditional custodians of the lands on which Flinders has a presence. Our aim is to be recognised as the global leader in rural and remote health research, and as a global leader in the development of an appropriately skilled, competent rural and remote health workforce.

Our future success is only ever possible thanks to those who have achieved in the past. It is the strengths of our alumni – your work, your relationship with us, your achievements, and your interactions with the College's current students and alumni community – that keep the University relevant. This is the foundation upon which we can build the connections and relationships necessary to grow and prosper.

Thank you for the role that each of you continue to play in the life of Flinders University.

Professor Jonathan Craig
*Vice President and Executive Dean
College of Medicine and Public Health*

New vision builds faith in future healing



The new leaders of the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health at Flinders University are behind an ambitious 2030 target to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in health by 200.

Flinders University alumni Poche Centre Director Shane Mohor and Deputy Director Dr Maree Meredith are part of the groundswell of Indigenous Australians following advanced learning pathways and adding to the prospect of “healthy country and culture” in their communities and across the nation.

With support from the College of Medicine and Public Health and Flinders NT, the Poche Centre is part of a national network of centres which aims to close the health gap by providing a range of tertiary learning pathways, creating community partnerships and research collaborations.

Mr Mohor, one of Flinders’ first Indigenous graduates of the Bachelor of Nursing Practice (1995), and Dr Meredith, the first Poche Centre PhD graduate at Flinders (2018), are excited by the prospect of building the University’s central corridor of education, research and health care, stretching from Mount Gambier to Nhulunbuy.

“The Flinders University Poche Centre for Indigenous Health will focus on developing more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, and building the health workforce throughout South Australia, the Northern Territory, and beyond,” says Mr Mohor, who will share his time between the University’s Bedford Park campus and Flinders NT centres.

“Incorporating the best of traditional and western medicine – and the energy of future generations – we will focus on the need for advancement of Aboriginal workers in all facets of health care delivery,” he says.

Based in Darwin, Dr Meredith says she is pleased to be giving back and able to develop other health leaders in the Flinders NT central corridor – “from school age right through to the elderly”.

“I am a great believer in our communities and people finding solutions, along with interdisciplinary education and teaching to develop the next cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers,” she says.

**Shane Mohor
(BNGPrac '95) and
Dr Maree Meredith
(PhD(OtherHlthSc) '18)**

Comprising 3% of Australia’s population, Indigenous communities battle with higher rates of chronic and infectious disease, incarceration, unemployment and social disruption than non-Indigenous people. A key to change rests with future generations, with 36% of Australia’s Indigenous community aged under 15, and with a median age of 22 years compared with 38 years for non-Indigenous Australians (in 2011). From the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2014 Report.



Tackling racism in health care

It's clear to Tamara Mackean, as it is to many others, that a seismic shift is needed to close the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health gap in Australia.

While the Australian Government's Closing the Gap Refresh is starting to form targets to sustainably reconcile some of these inequities, Associate Professor Tamara Mackean is determined to make inroads into the "decolonisation" of health care.

She has doggedly chased Australian Government research funding to make real-world impact on decolonising primary health care, assessing the roles of Indigenous liaison officers in quality acute care, and in other areas such as fall prevention, health equity and regional primary health care planning.

As part of a groundswell already under way, she believes it's a whole-of-system approach that will embed genuine individual, cultural and community needs into clinical settings.

"We're still seeing big differences in care provision and we're not closing the gap.

"Only when racism and white privilege are addressed will the system recognise and meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," she says, recognising it's a difficult thing to find and fund solutions for positive change to embedded attitudes.

"At present, even gold standard treatment and practices in acute care aren't always accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Sometimes they leave hospital with as many problems as when they presented."

Innovation is happening, she says, as people look outside the box to systematically pull in processes, experts and professionals to really work at the interface of different models of health and healing.

She says the appointment of cardiac Aboriginal health practitioners at the Southern Adelaide Local Health Network, and Aboriginal traditional healers, or Ngangkari, working with hospitals and health care facilities in the Northern Adelaide Local Health Network are excellent examples.

Associate Professor Tamara Mackean

Tamara Mackean, a Waljén woman from Western Australia, is Associate Professor: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health with the College of Medicine and Public Health at Flinders University. She is also a Conjoint Associate Professor at The George Institute for Global Health (UNSW), and is chief and co-investigator on a number of National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and other projects.

She is a public health medicine physician living and working on Kaurna land, based in the Discipline of Public Health, College of Medicine and Public Health at Flinders University.

New perspectives on chronic pain

Cutting-edge knowledge from Flinders University's Visceral Pain Research Group is delivering brighter futures for millions of sufferers of debilitating internal organ pain.

One of the first laboratories to move to the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI), the group includes Director, Professor Stuart Brierley and Head of Bladder Research, Dr Luke Grundy. These researchers are not just at the brink of new hope, they're already changing lives.

With a dozen projects on the go at any time, a recent success identified the mechanism of pain relief of a new drug, linaclotide, in treating patients with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

"IBS alone affects around 11% of the global population,"

explains Professor Brierley, a Matthew Flinders Fellow in Gastrointestinal Neuroscience.

General painkillers are ineffective for visceral pain, so there is enormous need to understand what's happening when tests reveal no abnormalities. In many cases, the search for a pain source is fruitless because the nerve pathways themselves are damaged.

"We know you can have a single pathological event like food poisoning or an infection, and some people's bodies don't reset to normal," says Professor Brierley.

"The nerves get into a hypersensitive state, and these abnormal pathways can transfer to another organ."

Neurourologist Dr Grundy joined the group five years ago, bringing expertise in bladder pain.

"The neural pathways innervating the colon and bladder have a number of similarities, and can interact in health and disease," says Dr Grundy.

"A third or more IBS sufferers are also burdened by bladder pain and vice versa, so a complete understanding is critical, rather than focusing on individual organs.

"A lot of the work we do is unravelling what causes nerves to become sensitive and the mechanisms to reverse this dysfunction."

This innovative approach is drawing attention from practitioners around the globe and inspiring other researchers, whose results feed into the group's research in a collaborative cycle that's piecing together targeted solutions – and reducing reliance on hazardous opioid-based painkillers.

Research in this lab has been made possible through funding from an NHMRC R.D. Wright Biomedical Fellowship, an ARC Discovery Grant, NHMRC Project Grants, Ironwood Pharmaceuticals, Arena Pharmaceuticals, and Flinders University Seed Funding for Early Career Researchers.

**Dr Luke Grundy and
Professor Stuart Brierley**



Fine-tuning for super-charged cancer outcomes

What if our most powerful drugs could be tailored to each patient, taking into account individual biochemistry and how they uniquely process medicine, with their optimal dose determined by a simple blood test?

“The way an individual responds to a drug depends on what is in their body,” explains Flinders University Associate Professor in Clinical Pharmacology Andrew Rowland, a Cancer Council Beat Cancer Research Fellow.

“Too much of a drug can have an adverse effect, while not enough reduces its therapeutical value.”

Research into precision medicine and its efficient application is growing all over the world.

When treating cancer, therapeutical value is critical – and there is a fine line between having enough of a drug and receiving too much.

Doctors know that the benefits of a class of anti-cancer drugs called kinase inhibitors are substantially greater when dosage is tailored to an individual. However, this requires an invasive liver biopsy to reveal how enzymes are metabolising drugs in that particular person.

Instead, doctors usually take a blood sample and base medication choice on mutations found.

Associate Professor Rowland heads up the Precision Medicine Group at Flinders University. His team has devised a strategy to understand how an individual will tolerate these powerful and expensive drugs through a simple blood test.

“We hope to see a blood sample not only guide doctors on what drug to use, but also the precise dose for each patient,” he says.

The focus of his research is a strategy using biomarkers called ADMExosomes that are produced in all organs of the body, including the liver.

“The concentration of this biomarker can provide a very accurate picture of what’s happening in someone’s liver and how they are metabolising medications,” he says.

Clinical trials at the team’s Flinders University lab have established the technology through analysing hundreds of blood samples from healthy individuals.

“Outside of Flinders, no-one else is doing anything in this space.”

Associate Professor Rowland and Research Fellow Dr Madelé van Dyk have just returned from a mid-year trip to Connecticut in the USA, where they helped to establish testing methods in the labs of pharmaceutical giant Pfizer. This will enable USA and Australian trials to continue side by side, followed by trials using samples from people who have cancer.

Patented by Flinders University, Associate Professor Rowland says the ADMExosomes research is one of a kind.

This cutting-edge research has been made possible through funding from Pfizer, the Cancer Council’s Beat Cancer Project, and the National Health and Medical Research Council.





Associate Professor Andrew Rowland (BSc(Hons) '05, PhD(Med) '09) and Dr Madelé van Dyk (BMedSc '13, BSc(Hons) '14, PhD(Med) '18)

Patients as collaborators

Dr Madelé van Dyk runs the clinical trials at the Precision Medicine Group.

“My key activity is developing analytical chemistry-based methods to detect and quantify biomarkers and medicines that we’re interested in,” she says.

“While we continue to collect samples to prove our strategy with ADMExosomes, we’re also exploring other markers and personalised approaches that could expand our knowledge to other groups of cancer drugs.”

Dr van Dyk’s work also focuses on translation, including patient involvement to shape the research and its clinical application.

“Ryan Hodges is someone we work with closely,” she explains.

“A cancer patient himself, he helps us understand what makes sense from a patient perspective.”

Mr Hodges was diagnosed with a rare cancer at the age of 32. At stage four, his outlook was bleak but the targeted therapy

he received has given him time – a precious resource he uses to advocate and raise funds for research into targeted cancer treatment.

“One of our recent grant applications involved communication between clinicians and patients, and he actually re-wrote part of that to make it patient-friendly,” Dr van Dyk says.

“His input is so valuable and we have a great relationship. We meet with him and other patients to get insight into their thoughts and needs, and we appreciate their advice on how we can improve our work.”



Announcing the launch of the Flinders Health and Medical Research Institute



Professor Ross McKinnon
(BSc(Hons) '89, PhD(Med) '93)
Director, Flinders Health & Medical Research Institute; Dean (Research), College of Medicine and Public Health

Flinders University has always been a leader in health and medical research. Co-located with Flinders Medical Centre, our research focuses on the questions that matter and contributes solutions that have a direct impact on our communities – locally, nationally and globally.

Our researchers have changed clinical practice across the world. They have been instrumental in national public health initiatives, tackled global health issues, and changed how we connect with health services and information.

FHMRI, the Flinders Health and Medical Research Institute, is bold, ambitious and collaborative.

The Institute will showcase the breadth and depth of our research to the world.

Through it, we will welcome new partnerships and collaborations, and enhance our existing relationships. For our researchers, it will provide new opportunities and empower bold ideas that address the big health questions.

FHMRI will train the next generation of health research leaders in an environment of excellence and in a culture centred around people and social vision.

For the first time, it will bring our research together as a single institute – the biggest at Flinders University – encompassing almost half of the University's research.

It will bring together 18 research centres, hundreds of researchers, and 200 PhD students.



Flinders University’s footprint spans the Central Australian Corridor, from Mount Gambier in the south-east and throughout the Northern Territory, up to Nhulunbuy. FHMRI will build on many of our existing strengths such as sleep, cancer, eye and vision, and expand to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, rural and remote health, ageing and health data.

FHMRI is designed to be a focal point for future investment and future growth, and in particular to attract and retain excellent staff, develop high-level partnerships, and bring Flinders into every conversation about medical research in South Australia and beyond.

The Institute itself will focus on education, research and clinical elements with three thematic areas: Molecular Biosciences (clinically informed innovation), Clinical Translation (evidence-informed health care), and Healthy Communities (improving health outcomes for all).



FHMRI
FLINDERS HEALTH & MEDICAL
RESEARCH INSTITUTE



Professor Damien Keating, Deputy Director: FHMRI
Theme leader: Molecular Biosciences (clinically informed innovation) will have a focus on discovery medicine and finding scientific solutions to clinical problems, with a primary focus on our surrounding communities and beyond, striving to help people live longer and healthier lives.



Professor Danny Eckert, Deputy Director: FHMRI
Theme leader: Clinical Translation (evidence-informed health care) will facilitate clinically-relevant, innovative research that can be readily applied to solve major problems and improve the health and wellbeing of our community.



Professor Jon Karnon, Deputy Director: FHMRI
Theme leader: Healthy Communities (improving health outcomes for all) will address health disparities, and develop and evaluate health policies and healthcare services that meet the needs of the community.

Scholarships support Yolngu medical student



Dr Mangatjay McGregor (BClinSc/ MD '18) wears Yolngu adornments at his Flinders University graduation, December 2018

Twenty-seven-year-old Flinders University graduate Dr Mangatjay McGregor is believed to be the very first Yolngu medical doctor.

Dr Mangatjay McGregor grew up on Milingimbi Island, a remote Aboriginal community in North East Arnhem Land, at the very top of the Northern Territory. Even as a small child he had an immense empathy for others who were in pain.

"I took great interest in listening to the concerns of friends and family," says Dr McGregor.

"I find helping people through their hardships to be a very rewarding experience, and I decided that I would pursue a career in medicine where I could put this passion to good use."

In 2011 Dr McGregor moved to Adelaide to study medicine at Flinders University.

"Moving so far away from home was a challenging and life-changing experience. I was uprooted from my usual support network and forced outside of my comfort zone. Because of this, and through my time at Flinders, I developed a lot of strength and resilience. I also established some deep friendships that continue to this day."

During his studies, Dr McGregor received the donor-funded Professor Michael Kidd AM Scholarship and the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health Fund Scholarship. While the scholarships allowed Dr McGregor to purchase essential textbooks and study resources, they also enabled him to broaden his clinical experience through unique and life-changing clinical placements.

"The scholarships supported my studies in many ways. In my final year of medicine I was able to afford a car to travel back to Arnhem Land for a six week clinic placement and I was also able to do a six week medical placement in Zambia."

Dr McGregor is now an intern at Royal Darwin Hospital. He says, "It's been nice to come home to the NT for a while. I'm in the process of applying for paediatric training as I'd like to be a paediatrician or child psychiatrist in the future."

Dr McGregor hopes to one day return to his hometown of Milingimbi to set up prevention programs and put his fluency in two Yolngu dialects to good use.

"I want to make a positive change for not only my people, but for as many Indigenous people as I can reach out to."

Scholarships create a world of opportunity

Your support for Flinders University students in financial need can have life-changing impact. Removing financial pressures allows students to focus on their study, access new opportunities, achieve their degree, and work towards their personal career goals.

Create opportunity and donate today at flinders.edu.au/giving

100% of your donation will be directed towards the fund you identify. Donations of \$2 and over are tax deductible.



Dr Julie Tullett (BMBS(GradEntry) '10)

Called to a country practice

In her third year of medicine at Flinders University, Dr Julie Tullett did a Parallel Rural Community Curriculum placement in Mount Gambier – loved the region and stayed. Nine years later the practice where Dr Tullett is now Partner has been recognised for its important contribution to the rural community.

The Parallel Rural Community Curriculum program is a highly successful initiative by Flinders University to introduce third year medical students to the rigours, challenges and rewards of rural and regional medicine. World recognised and highly regarded, the program has produced medical professionals of the highest standard, many who have returned to regional locations to make their homes within the community.

This was certainly the case for Dr Tullett. “After spending my third-year placement here in Mount Gambier I was really excited to come back as a GP Registrar.

By the time I did my Internship I knew all the other specialists in the area, which made my job much easier,” says Dr Tullett, who is originally from the UK.

“I fell in love with this beautiful Blue Lake town and have lived here ever since.”

Dr Tullett is now GP Partner at Hawkins Medical Practice in Mount Gambier. This year the clinic was recognised as the SA and NT General Practice of the Year by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP). The award celebrates the important contribution GPs make to the health of patients and communities across Australia, and recognises the significant achievements of RACGP members.

“This award is very special as my GP Supervisor, Dr Mark Morgan, received the same award 17 years ago. He was a great inspiration to me, and I am

closely following in his footsteps – I am now a GP Partner in his previous practice and even have his office!” says Dr Tullett. “It is fantastic to have acknowledgement of all the hard work we do as a team.”

A popular service for the local community, the clinic recently expanded into a new purpose-built clinic as it was running out of room for its 25 GPs.

“This year I am focusing on business management and improving the working environment for staff, along with encouraging more Flinders Medical students to come to this beautiful area,” says Dr Tullett.

Flinders graduate Dr Raphael Torome (GradCertClinEd '07) was also recognised by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners as 2019 General Practice Supervisor of the Year, and Dr Emily Kilner (MD '15) won the 2019 David Game Prize for the highest score in the general practice examinations.

Flinders first responders

Maryanne Elsby ASM

When Maryanne Elsby embarked on her paramedic career in the South Australian Ambulance Service (SAAS) in the early 1980s, she never imagined her experience would carve out a respected reputation for driving change in pre-hospital emergency medicine.

“Paramedicine is an amazing career. I’ve had opportunities to work in diverse remote areas, mentored and supported colleagues, and participated in groundbreaking patient-focused programs,” she says.

Ms Elsby (Bachelor of Health Sciences (Ambulance Studies) 2000) was a Clinical Team Leader at SAAS when the degree was first offered.

“I am very proud to say that I was the first SAAS employee to graduate from Flinders University – 20 years has gone quickly.”

As a Clinical Team Leader at SAAS in the early '90s, Ms Elsby participated in the evolving Intensive Care Paramedic Program,

mentoring graduates in their on-road internship and as a sessional lecturer.

“I could not imagine doing anything else. This job is a perfect fit for me. The camaraderie, support and lifelong friendships developed over the years cannot be underestimated.

“It has been a privilege to mentor, educate, lead, support and provide assistance to SAAS colleagues and the community of South Australia for over 37 years.”

“I have been an early participant in clinical trials, new equipment and programs for SAAS. The advancement in clinical scope of practice is such a key driver for me as it evolves our profession, but, more importantly, improves clinical outcomes for our patients.”

For the past 10 years, she has worked as specialist clinician, an extended care paramedic, independently managing clients in residential care facilities and

in the community as part of emergency department avoidance strategies.

A second part of her role is that of the State Clinician in the Emergency Operations Centre in Adelaide, where she provides clinical oversight to service delivery across the state.

“It’s very rewarding and challenging work. Unfortunately, there is less opportunity to mentor than in the Intensive Care Paramedic Program, but I still seek out any opportunity to host university students who do placements with the Extended Care Paramedic team.”

Ms Elsby’s service was recognised with an Ambulance Service Medal in the 2017 Queen’s Birthday Honours.

“This was an incredible honour which I accepted with great pride and humility. To be acknowledged in this way for just doing your job is a great privilege.”

**Maryanne Elsby ASM
(BHlthSc(AmbSt) '00)**





Laura Mannes

Laura Mannes and husband William Harrison were out for dinner in Paris when terrorists attacked the French capital in November 2015.

The two paramedics rushed Ms Mannes' parents and other Parisians to safety inside their hotel foyer but didn't stay themselves – they grabbed bedsheets and pillowcases, and went back on the street to find potential victims.

With no equipment on hand, the couple courageously stemmed the blood of victims injured in attacks that left 130 people dead.

“Without our equipment and drugs we are pretty limited in what we can do. It really is pretty much basic first aid, the same as anyone else, but I guess we probably have more confidence in our ability to execute it,” says Ms Mannes.

Despite the genuine threat posed by terrorists with AK-47 rifles, the couple relied on their skills and training in high pressure situations.

They did what they could to help terror victims until French paramedics arrived with equipment.

Ms Mannes completed her Bachelor of Paramedic Science in 2014, studying almost entirely by distance learning while working with Ambulance Tasmania. After graduating in 2014 she jumped at the chance to work in the UK with London Ambulance Service (LAS).

Ms Mannes is now working with the Service's Tactical Response Unit – the specialist team trained and equipped to respond to mass casualty and armed incidents.

“I am currently also working as an Advanced Trauma Medic with London's Air Ambulance, which sees me respond to patients injured in London, with a doctor and often a consultant.”

The Air Ambulance's emergency medical team responds to the most critical incidents among the six to seven thousand calls the LAS receives per day – by helicopter during daylight hours and by car at night.



Laura Mannes with a London Air Ambulance (BParamedicSc '14)

(Inset photo: Courtesy news.com.au)

“As well as bringing a range of advanced interventions to the scene, we also bring experience and scene management to these often stressful calls that normal on-road crews don't attend very often.”

The couple's incredible bravery was recognised with an Office of the Governor-General personal medallion presented by Sir Peter Cosgrove during a surprise workplace visit in 2016.

“It was very humbling, and an honour to meet Sir Peter Cosgrove and his wife. They were the most lovely, genuine couple.”

In July 2020 Flinders will hold a special celebration to mark 20 years since the first paramedic graduates crossed the stage. Look out for details in the monthly alumni e-news or contact Jane Russell (see page 19).

Where are they now?

Flinders University Alumni



Lieutenant Colonel Dr Ben Butson CSC

Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor
of Surgery (Honours) 1999

Dr Ben Butson feels privileged to have been able to combine his two career passions in Townsville – the Army and emergency and retrieval medicine.

He spent more than a decade as a medical officer in the Australian Army and was deployed overseas on active duty to East Timor, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Solomon Islands.

He recalls one of his finest moments as returning safely from Balad Air Base in Iraq in 2005.

“I spent over three months in the busiest war trauma centre in the world at that time, embedded in a US-led intensive care facility.”

“It was the busiest and most professionally rewarding time of my military and medical careers,” says Dr Butson, who was awarded a Conspicuous Service Cross in the 2006 Australia Day Honours.

The Australian Defence Force Medical Specialist Program enables him to work at the Townsville Hospital and be available for short-warning medical deployments with the Army.

“I do two clinical shifts per week as a Consultant in the Emergency Department – one anaesthetics list, and one pre-hospital and retrieval shift. I am also the Clinical Lead for LifeFlight Retrieval Medicine in Townsville.”

Dr Butson has fond memories of Flinders and recalls his son Harry coming in to the Medical School as a baby to help the class practise paediatric exams.

“Today he is a medical student himself, as is my daughter Emily.”

He has particular admiration for Dr John (Jack) Shepherd, the founding president of the Australian College for Rural and Remote Medicine, who was a great mentor to him.

“I worked with Jack as a student, as an Intern and as a junior Army doctor when he came over to East Timor with me on active duty. He is a truly remarkable man and was an inspirational teacher.”

Liz Kennedy

Master of Primary Health Care 2001

A year volunteering in Cambodia, as part of the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program, launched a career which has taken Liz Kennedy across Asia and the Pacific.

“I spent 10 years working in HIV prevention programming in Asia and the Pacific before moving into the area of non-communicable disease, including rheumatic heart disease. For the past five years I have lived in Fiji, working with the Ministry of Health. It has been a fascinating experience and opportunity to work so closely with government. At the moment I am working to strengthen quality and efficiency of primary screening programs (cardiovascular risk, diabetes and female cancers) with a specific focus on the use of digital platforms, opportunities for enhanced reporting, and improving access to screen results.”

“Equal access to health is a big driver for me,” says Ms Kennedy.

In addition to her work on population screening in Fiji, this year Ms Kennedy was appointed Senior Technical Advisor for Reach, a Geneva-based NGO established for the prevention and control of rheumatic heart disease (RHD). RHD is the most commonly acquired heart disease in young people under the age of 25, and leads to more than 230,000 deaths globally each year. The disease affects millions in the poorer regions in Africa and the Asia-Pacific, with a high prevalence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Almost all cases of RHD are preventable using simple and cost effective strategies and treatments.

“In late July I was in the Philippines conducting a needs assessment to help identify interventions that are needed in the immediate term to address the high burden of RHD.”

“Reach was invited to conduct a technical visit by the Philippine Heart Foundation, which witnesses first hand the cost of this disease, particularly among children and adolescents.”

“Working closely with the Fiji Government, I was involved in global advocacy and campaign efforts that resulted in the passing of an RHD resolution at the World Health Assembly last year. This is a major step forward in shining a light on this important disease, and one that will compel governments with a high burden of disease and WHO to step up efforts and response.”



Dr Tom Snelling

Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (Honours) 1998

Paediatrician and infectious diseases physician Dr Tom Snelling is passionate about research, and particularly about embedding research within routine care. His work has a strong focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and international child health, and he is also investigating the safety of vaccination in early childhood. He is Director of the Wesfarmers Centre of Vaccines and Infectious Diseases at the Telethon Kids Institute, and also works at Perth Children’s Hospital.

“I came to enjoy working with children and their families early in my clinical career, and this has only grown since having kids of my own,” says Dr Snelling.

An important part of Dr Snelling’s work has been dedicated to finding ways to better prevent and treat severe gastroenteritis in remote Australia. He attributes this to an experience in his final year at Flinders when he joined his friend Gavin Shepherd on an elective at Alice Springs Hospital.

“It gave me a greater appreciation for the disparities in health across Australia, as well as a deep respect for the breadth of knowledge and skills of our regional and remote clinical workforce.”

“I also developed a healthy respect for the rotavirus (and the importance of hand hygiene) after it saw me laid up with gastro for the best part of a week.

“My work ranges from describing the variation in practice and outcomes for clinical conditions, comparing the safety and effectiveness of alternative therapies, and formally evaluating preventive and treatment strategies through pragmatic clinical trials. I am particularly interested in new ways of learning in health care by designing and implementing adaptive clinical trials.”

Last year Dr Snelling and his colleagues at the Telethon Kids Institute were awarded a \$3.4 million Medical Research Future Fund grant to implement this new form of trial that will hopefully lead to improved life expectancy for sufferers of cystic fibrosis across Australia. The trial simultaneously evaluates a range of cystic fibrosis treatment strategies and quickly eliminates those found to be inferior, paving the way for more effective available alternatives for participants.

“I find my work keeps me constantly challenged, sometimes uncomfortably so. I think transitioning from being a PhD student to an independent clinical researcher was particularly hard. It was very tempting to walk away from a research career and just focus on clinical work. I hope to prove the value of research to hospitals, so that things will be easier for the next generation of clinician researchers.”

Alumni achievements

Australian of the Year 2019

Dr Richard Harris SC OAM (BMBS '89) and his dive partner Dr Craig Challen SC OAM were honoured as joint 2019 Australian of the Year for their heroic efforts in the rescue of 12 boys and their soccer coach from within the Tham Luang Nang Non cave in Thailand in July 2018.

Dr Harris is a 2018 Flinders University Distinguished Alumni awardee and was formally presented with his award at the Flinders 2019 Investigator Lecture in August this year.

Dr Harris, who graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (BMBS) in 1989, works at Specialist Anaesthetic Services, as a Retrieval Consultant for MedSTAR, and as medical lead for the SA Urban Search and Rescue Task Force.



Australian Honours 2019

Australia Day Honours

Professor John Beltrame AM

BMBS '86, for significant service to cardiovascular medicine, and to medical research and education.

Queen's Birthday Honours

Air Vice-Marshal (Dr) Tracy Smart AM

BMBS '87, for distinguished service in responsible positions to the Australian Defence Force in the fields of medical and health services.

Associate Professor John Litt AM

PhD(Med) '07, for significant service to preventative medicine as an influenza specialist, and as a general practitioner.

Dr David Martin OAM

MSurg '07, for service to medicine in the field of orthopaedics.

Flinders University Alumni Awards 2018

The awards acknowledge the significant contribution made by Flinders alumni to the community, the University or within their chosen field. The 2019 awardees will be announced later this year. The 2018 winners from the College of Medicine and Public Health are:

Dr Jenny Baker

Master of Primary Health Care '95, PhD (Social Sciences) '07.

Dr Richard Harris SC OAM

BMBS '89.

Associate Professor Anne Johnson AM

PhD (Medicine) '99, Diploma of Teaching (Nurse Educator) '86.

Air Vice-Marshal (Dr) Tracy Smart AM

BMBS '87.

Flinders University Medal 2018

Flinders honours graduates achieving academic excellence:

Heidi Bitzer

BSc(Hons) '18, BMedSc '17.

Julia Demura

BMedSc(Hons) '19.

Megan Dubowsky

BMedSc(Hons) '19, BBehavSc(Psych) '19.

Quinn Martin

BMedSc(Hons) '19, BSc '18.

Katie Morrison

BMedSc(Hons) '19.

Govinda Poudel

BMedSc(Hons) '19.

Blossoming research career for top student

2018 Flinders University Medallist Katie Morrison (BMedSc(Hons) '19) was also winner of the 2017 Ken Wanganeen Medal, awarded to the top performing Indigenous undergraduate student.

She received a UniSA Vacation Research Scholarship at SAHMRI in 2018, a Heart Research Institute Winter Research Scholarship in 2017, and the Flinders Medical Nursing and Health Sciences 2016-2017 Summer Research Award. She is also a composer and performer in the Flinders University cultural project 'Bound and Unbound', which toured to Sydney this year. Ms Morrison is now a Research Assistant in Flinders Cancer Research within Flinders Health and Medical Research Institute.



Reunions & celebrations

Coming up in 2020

Flinders First Responders – Celebrating 20 years of Paramedicine at Flinders, July 2020 Do you have memories or photos to share? Are you interested in joining the organising committee? Contact Jane Russell – see ‘Stay in touch’ below.

30 years: BMBS 1990, March 2020 Organiser Professor Bogda Koczwara. Details to be advised via email and newsletter.

20 years: BMBS 2000 Organiser Jane Russell. Details to be advised via email and newsletter.



BMBS 1999 reunion group re-enact their graduation photo, September 2019



David Wattachow, Wendy Graham, Rupert Thorne, Michael Sandow, Lachlan Warren, Val Luckman and Henry Duncan cubicle cramming

Foundation Class 40 Year Reunion, 16 October 2020

Join your classmates to celebrate 40 years since the first medicine students crossed the graduation stage at Flinders University. The commencing class of 1974 organising committee includes Drs Julie Forsyth, Helen Patronegy, Valerie Summers, Suzanne Szekely and David Wattachow. For more details contact Jane Russell.

Stay in touch

For help with organising your own reunion, contact the College Alumni Partner, Jane Russell, via alumni@flinders.edu.au or +61 8 7421 9758

To make sure we invite you to events, keep your details up to date via www.flinders.edu.au/alumni



Engage Me: win a MacBook Pro*

Flinders University graduates, for your chance to win tell us how you would like to engage with Flinders

ENTER NOW flinders.edu.au/engageme

Competition closes: 31 December 2019

*Ts&Cs apply. CRICOS No. 00114A.





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