



# PathWay

THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PATHOLOGISTS OF AUSTRALASIA



February 2015 | Published by RCPA

Issue #044

## In This Issue

- Diagnosis by the Yarra is a record breaker
- RCPA Foundation nurtures next generation pathologists
- Fellowship awardees gain international experience in genomic medicine
- Negative test results often lead to positive outcomes

## Welcome to the February edition of ePathWay

Pathology Update 2015 kicks off this Friday at the Melbourne Convention Centre. Attendance is almost at record-breaking numbers, and the outstanding program reflects this year's conference title of *Diagnosis by the Yarra*.

Go to [Pathology Update 2015](#) for more information or attend on-site if you still wish to register. We've also interviewed RCPA CEO Dr Debra Graves about this year's conference.

The RCPA Foundation funds initiatives to help us gain a greater understanding of the causes of disease. We've highlighted the Foundation's *Mike and Carole Ralston Travelling Fellowship*, and interviewed the first two awardees to find out what they used it for.

And finally, as a nod to the conference title of *Diagnosis by the Yarra*, we've highlighted how negative test results can be valuable diagnostic signposts.

Follow Pathology Update 2015 on Twitter ([#PathUpdate@PathologyRCPA](#)) and on the RCPA's [Facebook](#) page.

You can also follow our CEO Dr Debra Graves ([@DebraJGraves](#)) or the College ([@PathologyRCPA](#)) on Twitter.

## Interesting Facts

1242

The number of delegates (registered so far) for Pathology Update 2015

131

The number of speakers at Pathology Update 2015

7

The number of international guest speakers at Pathology Update 2015

Source: RCPA

## Diagnosis by the Yarra is a record breaker



## Important Message

Diagnosis by the Yarra could sound ominous if you didn't know it's the theme for Pathology Update 2015 organised by The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA). Conference organisers are pleased to announce that this year's attendance is a record breaker.

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## RCPA Foundation nurtures next generation pathologists

While next generation sequencing is a key topic in genetics, next generation pathologists are the future of medicine. That's why the RCPA Foundation is committed to funding initiatives that lead to a greater understanding of the causes of diseases. An effective way to do this is through scholarships such as the Mike and Carole Ralston Travelling Fellowship.

"Having encouraged the then College President and my good friend, Prof Paul McKenzie, to get the Foundation off the ground, I felt we were honour bound to support it," explains Mr Ralston<sup>1</sup>.

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Mike & Carole Ralston

## Fellowship awardees gain international experience in genomic medicine

The Mike and Carole Ralston Travelling Fellowship was created in March 2013 through the direct generosity of Honorary Fellow and Fellow of the Faculty of Science Mr Mike Ralston and his wife Carole. It is administered by the RCPA Foundation. We caught up with the first two awardees to find out what they studied and where.

Dr Sebastiaan van Hal, infectious diseases microbiologist at Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, was the inaugural awardee in 2013. He used the Fellowship to learn about bacterial genetics at the Oxford Genomic Centre in England.

[read more »](#)



Dr Sebastiaan van Hal

## Negative test results often lead to positive outcomes

It's probably happened to most people. Their pathology test results are negative or 'within normal range' and therefore the test was 'a waste of time'. But Dr Andrew Packer, General Pathologist practising in New Zealand, says negative test results are usually very important signposts.



"A lot of laboratory testing returns negative test results but they are as important and as valuable as positive ones," he explains.

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## RCPA Message



**Pathology gives life's most important answers.**



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## Previous Editions



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ISSUE #043

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- Santa's annual eating binge won't affect one particular test for diabetes
- King hits, alcohol and holiday hearts can spoil the party
- Clinical Forensic Medicine plays a key part in assessing child abuse
- Pathology helps diagnose

### Welcome to the December/January edition of ePathWay

The holiday season is a time when people may feel like letting their hair down and partying, eating and drinking more than usual. They may also wonder what it does to their blood sugar levels! But the latest diagnostic test for diabetes in Australia isn't affected by binges which is good news for super-binging Santa who eats thousands of treats on Christmas Eve!

Our newest Faculty of Clinical Forensic Medicine is highlighted with an insight into pathology and child abuse. We've also asked an expert about king hits and alcohol, and pinned down the elusive polycystic ovarian syndrome.

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## Diagnosis by the Yarra is a record breaker



Diagnosis by the Yarra could sound ominous if you didn't know it's the theme for Pathology Update 2015 organised by The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA). Conference organisers are pleased to announce that this year's attendance is a record breaker.

"Pathology Update is a fabulous meeting where College Fellows can talk to pathology trainees, and pathologists can talk to their colleagues from other disciplines and laboratories from all over Australasia," says Dr Debra Graves, CEO of the RCPA.

"We have 1242 delegates coming so far which exceeds our attendance record."

Dr Graves says Pathology Update showcases the exceptional standard of pathology across Australasia every year, with seven concurrent scientific sessions running at the same time.

"The Scientific Program Committees work very hard putting together outstanding sessions for their disciplines. The College certainly appreciates their efforts and expertise," says Dr Graves.

There's also expertise offered from seven overseas speakers including the Director of the Division of STD Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Chairman of the WHO Working Group on the classification of soft tissue tumours.

The Scientific Program Committees have also lined up 131 exceptional speakers from across Australasia talking about topics as diverse as *The Molecular Architecture of Disease and Beyond booze, weed and speed: emerging drug trends*.

All of this, and more, happens by the Yarra from Friday 27 February to Sunday 1 March at the Melbourne Convention Centre. And if a diagnosis is needed by the Yarra at that time, you know there are over 1000 specialist doctors gathered nearby.



Go to [Pathology Update 2015](#) for more information, or if you still wish to register attend the registration desk in person.

Follow the conference on Twitter ([#PathUpdate](#) [@PathologyRCPA](#)) and on the RCPA's [Facebook page](#).

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"Having encouraged the then College President and my good friend, Prof Paul McKenzie, to get the Foundation off the ground, I felt we were honour bound to support it," explains Mr Ralston<sup>[1]</sup>.

"Carole and I decided on a travelling fellowship so that young pathologists and scientists would have an opportunity to acquire skills from other countries to help enhance our genetic skills in Australia."

The Foundation currently offers six annual awards and grants, including the Ralston Travelling Fellowship. It has so far been awarded to two young researchers; Dr Sebastiaan van Hal in 2013 and Dr Yasmin Harvey in 2014 (read about them in this edition). Mr Ralston said he and his wife Carole had been in contact with both recipients.

"The rewards were seeing the next generation develop and support potentially groundbreaking research," he says.

Mr Ralston says the RCPA Foundation provides an opportunity for retired pathologists to give something back to the profession.

"We would like to say to long-established pathologists out there, especially those in private practice, that many of you have made a good living over many years and you will be pleasantly surprised how good it will make you feel to help support young pathologists and scientists to develop the knowledge needed to shine in this changing world of cutting-edge technology and academic skills."

Mr Ralston says the key issue in advancing pathology research is funding.

“Money is a prime requirement for young pathologists and clinical scientists if they wish to gain new skills by visiting and training in prestigious research and diagnostic centres overseas and bring back that acquired knowledge to Australia. If we can provide grants to these young pathologists/scientists, we can enhance the delivery of genomic medicine, or indeed any branch of pathology/medicine, in this country.”

The RCPA Foundation is looking for more senior and retired pathologists, organisations and other individuals to offer annual grants. Contributions can be linked to a specific discipline. The Foundation’s staff are also open to ideas for a new award or grant that reflects a donor’s areas of interest.

Find out about the [RCPA Foundation](#), including avenues to support its work.

[1] Mr Ralston is an Honorary Fellow of the College and a Fellow of the Faculty of Science. He was previously CEO of a successful pathology practice in eastern Victoria and, after retiring, lobbied the RCPA to establish a Foundation to provide research grants.

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Dr Sebastiaan van Hal, infectious diseases microbiologist at Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, was the inaugural awardee in 2013. He used the Fellowship to learn about bacterial genetics at the Oxford Genomic Centre in England.

"I went with the aim of learning how to analyse whole genomic sequencing of bacteria, specifically *Enterococcus faecium*. The problem with bacterial genomics is that most commercial systems are aimed at analysing human genetics," explains Dr van Hal. "I learned how to analyse whole genomes using multiple applications, and brought that expertise back to Australia."

Dr van Hal intends to apply this expertise to infection control, including looking at ways to stop infections at a genetic level.

"I took time off work and spent five months studying in the UK, and I couldn't have done it without the Fellowship."

Haematology registrar Dr Yasmin Harvey was awarded the Fellowship in 2014. She used it to coordinate and secure the opportunity to work at the British Columbia Cancer Agency in Vancouver, Canada.

"I am currently researching the application of the NanoString platform utilising formalin-fixed paraffin embedded tissue biopsies to analyse gene expression profiles in Hodgkin lymphoma patients," she explains.

"I hope the outcome of my research will contribute to enabling improved outcomes for patients with Hodgkin lymphoma."

Dr Harvey says the Fellowship offered her the opportunity of a lifetime to gain experience and education in an area highly applicable to the practice of pathology in the near future.

“I believe this is an incredibly exciting time, particularly for pathology, so the opportunity to learn from leading research laboratories is priceless.”

You can find more information about the RCPA Foundation, including the Mike and Carole Ralston Travelling Fellowship, on the [College](#) website.

Read more about the [RCPA Foundation](#) in this edition as well.



*Dr Yasmin Harvey*

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It's probably happened to most people. Their pathology test results are negative or 'within normal range' and therefore the test was 'a waste of time'. But Dr Andrew Packer, General Pathologist practising in New Zealand, says negative test results are usually very important signposts.

"A lot of laboratory testing returns negative test results but they are as important and as valuable as positive ones," he explains.

"For example, your doctor might attribute your sore throat to a streptococcal infection and take a swab to send to the laboratory. In the meantime they write a script for antibiotics based on their assumption. If the result is negative and it's not a streptococcal infection but perhaps a viral infection, then the treatment changes and antibiotics are not needed."

Dr Packer says there are numerous examples of positive outcomes from negative test results.

"It's the biopsy of the lump that isn't cancer, the negative Pap smear that means no further investigations are required, the normal liver function test which indicates the problem isn't in the liver or the normal full blood count which tells us the patient doesn't have anaemia."

He says negative test results often save further diagnostic tests and procedures, and provide signposts pointing to which clinical pathways to explore to reach a diagnosis.

"They also provide intangible benefits in terms of putting patients at ease and relieving stress and worry when they find out their results are 'normal'."

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