



**Murdoch Childrens
Research Institute**

Postgraduate Students' Association

Postgraduate Students' Association

Annual Report 2008

This report is correct as of March 2009.

**The term of the committee commenced on Friday the 14th of March 2008
and concluded on Friday the 20th of March 2009.**

Postgraduate Students' Association committee members 2008 - 2009

The Postgraduate Students' Association members are from a diverse range of research areas including laboratory, clinical and public health. The committee represents research higher degree (RHD) students enrolled through The University of Melbourne and other universities and are affiliated with the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute (MCRI) and the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH).

President

Melody Menezes

Genetics Education and Health Research (Laboratory and Community Genetics)

Secretary

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Chromosome and Chromatin Research (Laboratory and Community Genetics)

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Healthy Communities (Healthy Development)

Student Liaison Officer

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Mental Health, Behaviour and Wellbeing (Healthy Development)

Website & IT Liaison Officer

Lydia Green

Chromosomes and Chromatin Research (Laboratory and Community Genetics)

Travel Scholarships Officer

Belinda McClaren

Genetics Education and Health Research (Laboratory and Community Genetics)

Non Executive Members

Amy Herlihy

Public Health Genetics (Laboratory and Community Genetics)

Ruth Nicholls

Language and Literacy (Healthy Development)

Sylvia Kauer

Mental Health, Behaviour and Wellbeing (Healthy Development)

Aims of the Postgraduate Student Association

The Postgraduate Students' Association aims to improve the professional development of our RHD students by encouraging interaction between students from different research areas within the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, The University of Melbourne's Department of Paediatrics, The Royal Children's Hospital and other external organisations and universities.

We aim to be a point of induction and information for new and current students. We represent the student's interests on the Dept. of Paediatrics Research Higher Degree committee and the MCRI executive.

We aim provide students with opportunities to share experiences and improve academic and career skills to best equip them for their future careers. We aim to increase awareness of university run activities and make these activities more accessible.

We also endeavour to attract external funding to provide various academic and social events. We also intend to provide funding opportunities to students through awards and scholarships.

We aim to support and improve the relationship between the postgraduate student body and the MCRI, Department of Paediatrics, and RCH. Liaise with each institution and improve awareness of the RHD student body on and off campus.

Annual Postgraduate Student Retreat

19th - 20th of September 2008
Warrenmang Vineyard Resort

Keeping your PhD Healthy

Attendance:

40 students attended the retreat, from 19 different research groups within the MCRI. There was a relatively even distribution between first, second and third year PhD students in attendance.

Topics and Speakers:

Your PhD Journey

Dr. MaryAnne Aitken - Group Leader, Research Strategy, MCRI

Getting Started on your Thesis

Dr. Jennifer Kloester - Author and Upskills presenter, University of Melbourne

Stress Management and Relaxation Workshop

Wayne Densley - Personal trainer/Health & Wellness Instructor, Ballarat YMCA

Career Panel: What are my options after a PhD?

Dr. Paul Lockhart - Senior Research Fellow, Genetic Health Research (Bruce Lefroy Centre), MCRI

Sophie Reid - Clinical Psychologist and Research Fellow, Centre for Adolescent Health, MCRI

MaryAnne Aitken - Group Leader, Research Strategy, MCRI

Media Workshop

Kylie Skotnicki - Media & Communications Officer, MCRI

Writing Skills Workshop

Jordana Bayer - Clinical Psychologist and Research Fellow, Centre for Community Child Health, MCRI

Funding

Funding for the retreat was provided by the MCRI and the Department of Paediatrics. Bioline and DNA Genotek both generously provided funding for the bar tab.

Social aspects

The 80's themed trivia night was a success, with students randomly allocated to tables. This enabled students to relax, forge new friendships and mingle with some of the invited speakers. Most of the students got into the theme with lots of fluoro, headbands, and old school dresses to be seen. The night provided some amusing competition with a 'best costume' dance-off between 5 nominees. The 80's themed music was a nice touch, getting most out on the dance floor.

Evaluation

Evaluation forms were completed by the majority of students who attended the retreat. Overall, 100% of students who responded found the retreat to be an enjoyable experience and 97% agreed the topics presented were relevant to them. The most popular session was Getting Started on your Thesis by Dr. Jennifer Kloester from the University of Melbourne's Upskills program. The Careers Panel Discussion was also very popular, coming in a close second. Organizing a bus was a new addition to the retreat and got great reviews with 100% of respondents wanting a bus again next year. Many students provided helpful suggestions for next year's retreat. Some comments from students include:

'A fun, rewarding experience! Great to meet other MCRI PhD students in a gorgeous environment with magnificent food! A friendly, supportive atmosphere!'

'More participation (if it's possible). The Friday sessions were great but I would have liked something a little more in depth rather than an overview'

'I think the retreat was great and a really good way to meet other students. The presenters were chosen really well and everything ran smoothly'



PSA Student Conference Travel Award 2008

A travel award of \$500 was offered to students in July 2008. The eligibility criteria were: the conference must be held in 2008; only one application per student; applicants must have an oral presentation, paper or poster at an interstate or overseas conference (award conditional on abstract selection for presentation at conference). The aim of the travel award was to recognise high quality science and well developed communication skills.

Nine applications were received and assessed by a panel of three senior researchers representing clinical, laboratory and public health research areas.

The winner was Hsiao Voon, a full-time PhD student in her third year of candidature. Hsiao presented her research at the 16th Hemoglobin Switching Conference at the Asilomar Conference Center, Monterey Peninsula, California, US.

A second award is being offered in March 2009, and will be facilitated by the existing committee, with the assistance of the new committee once elected.

Attendance

Over 60 students and supervisors attended the workshop.

Speaker

Dr. Roger Hurcombe of the Academic Skills Unit, University of Melbourne was invited to speak on “The Science and Art of Thesis Writing”.

The workshop focussed on scientific writing which was applicable to all postgraduate students and was enjoyed by all. A “Thesis Writers’ Circle” was borne out of this workshop with 8 PhD students and a facilitator (Gina Curro from the ASU) meeting weekly for 8 weeks to discuss writing and learn from one another. This was a great success with another circle to be scheduled in April.

The PSA would like to thank the Department of Paediatrics for providing catering and the MCRI for providing drinks for this workshop.

Friday afternoon seminar series

The Friday afternoon seminar series was held once every six weeks in the 10th floor MCRI conference rooms. An invited speaker or panel of speakers were asked to give a presentation in an informal setting with nibbles and drinks provided. The sessions were a chance for students to meet and get to know other students at the MCRI, and also to interact with senior researchers in a relaxed environment.

Invited speakers covered a wide variety of topics this year, including “How to approach, manage and balance our lives and study” (A/Prof Moira Inkelas - UCLA), “Things I wish I knew when I started” (Dr. Owen Marshall, Dr. Nick Wong and Lyn Chan), “Student involvement at MCRI” (Prof Terry Dwyer, Director) and “Shaking the Money Tree” (Julia Malone and Natasha Krajcar).

We would like to thank the MCRI for supporting this seminar series and for providing the PSA with beer and wine, DNA Genotek and Scientifix for providing sponsorship money and GeneWorks for providing consumables.

PSA Christmas Function

Attendance

About 60 students attended the function including PhD and masters students.

The Christmas function was a social gathering, where a pizza lunch was provided along with ice-cream sundaes for dessert. There was lots of Christmas cheer with candy canes, Christmas carols in the background and even a bit of tinsel. 10 lucky students walked away with a door prize of either chocolates or wine.

Buddy program for MCRI students

The MCRI Buddy program was launched in 2007 by the Postgraduate Students' Association (PSA) and the Early-Mid Career Research Association (EMCRA). The program provides an opportunity for postgraduate students to be 'buddied' with researchers at a post-doc level. It is similar to, but more informal than, the MCRI mentoring program and has been endorsed by Terry Dwyer and the MCRI.

For each applicant, the PSA and EMCRA identify a suitable buddy – a researcher working in a similar area, ie laboratory, public health or clinical research, from a different group and preferably a different theme. The Buddy program provides a forum for students to discuss ideas or problems they may be having throughout their candidature, and ask for advice and support from their buddy. Postgraduates and their Buddies can decide when and how often to meet. It may be for coffee once every couple of months, or a fortnightly phone call or email.

The PSA received a fantastic response to the 2007 program and ran a second successful round in 2008. Eleven postgraduate students took part. There was an even distribution of students from first, second and third/final years of candidature, and two students were based off-campus. In 2008, we also piloted an Honours Buddy program with four MCRI-based students. The table below presents feedback from 9 Postgraduate and 3 Honours students on the usefulness of different components of the program. Of the 12 who responded, 10 (83%) said that they would recommend the program to other students; one would not; and one was unsure. Seven students met with their Buddy twice or more in the second half of the year. Four students indicated that they would like to continue meeting their Buddy in 2009; three preferred not to, and five were unsure.

Usefulness of following program components, n*:	Not at all	A little/ quite a bit	Very
Having someone to talk to about my project	0	8	1
Having someone to talk to about my supervisor(s)	2	7	1
Having someone to talk to about life in general	1	6	3
Speaking to someone further along in a research career	0	5	5
Gaining an insight into another group's research and processes	0	8	2

*Missing n refers to 'not applicable' responses

Students reported that the best things about the program included being able to speak to someone in a successful research position in a way that allowed the student and Buddy to be honest when discussing their thoughts. Students reported the Buddy program also helped them consider their own research priorities and career.

Several students reported that the worst thing about the program was that it started too late in the year. Honours students, especially, reported that the program should begin in the first half of the year. Based on this, the PSA intend to begin the next Buddy program in April 2009 (application forms available at the AGM).

Funding

Funding of the Postgraduate Students' Association is outlined in Table 1.

The PSA received funding from UMPA (University of Melbourne Postgraduate Association) twice in 2008 upon application (there are 3 rounds each year).

In addition, the PSA actively sought external sponsorship and support by approaching around 90 biotechnology, scientific, pharmaceutical, commercial and healthcare companies. We raised a total of \$994 from scientific companies to fund RHD student academic and social events.

The MCRI and Department of Paediatrics are major supporters of the annual PSA retreat.

Table 1: Incoming funds source, amount and use.

Account Description	Debit	Credit	Balance
Balance brought forward		\$2,103	\$2,103
Sponsorships		\$1,094	\$3,197
GSA Funding (Formerly UMPA)		\$700	\$3,897
Retreat Funding MCRI		\$5,000	\$8,897
Retreat Funding Paeds		\$5,000	\$13,897
Seminar Costs	\$499		\$13,398
Travel Award x 1	\$500		\$12,898
Retreat Accommodation	\$8,088		\$4,810
Retreat Costs- speakers etc.	\$1,721		\$3,089
Total	\$10,808	\$13,897	\$3,089

Supporters and sponsors

The Postgraduate Students' Association would like to thank the following organisations for their generous support:

Gold Sponsors



Associate Sponsors



Acknowledgements

The Postgraduate Students' Association would like to thank Professor Terry Dwyer and Professor Paul Monagle for supporting postgraduate activities at the MCRI and the Department of Paediatrics. We would also like to thank Tracey Thiele, Kate Bride and the Dept. of Paediatrics RHD committee for their support.

The Postgraduate Students' Association thanks all the people who contributed their time to the students by participating in various social and professional development functions held in the past 12 months.

Terry Dwyer

Nigel Curtis

Moira Inkelas

MaryAnne Aitken

Nick Wong

Julia Malone

Natasha Krajcer

Owen Marshall

Paul Lockhart

Jennifer Kloester

Sophie Reid

Jordana Bayer

Kylie Stotnicki

Lyn Chan

Denise Kirby

Melissa Hill

Finally, The Postgraduate Students' Association would like to thank all postgraduate students at the MCRI for their support of the association and of postgraduate activities at the MCRI.

