



The Royal
Melbourne Hospital
Foundation

Royal News

SEPTEMBER 2019 | SPRING ISSUE

Philanthropic Legacy continued within Nephrology Department

Katy Honig has generously funded a newly created research position within the Nephrology Department for The Royal Melbourne Hospital.

“They were both holocaust survivors. My mother was in Auschwitz, and my father was in several concentration camps during World War II.”

The Honig Postdoctoral Research Fellow will examine the kidney's response to metabolic events. Successful completion of this research will provide invaluable insight into kidney function and identify biomarkers of early disease and prognosis, as well as potential therapeutic interventions.

The RMH Foundation was honoured to have Katy Honig share her family story with us. Katy told us that her parents have always been her role models.

“My late mother, Magdalena, was born in Czechoslovakia and my late father, Tobias in Poland. They were both holocaust survivors. My mother was in Auschwitz, and my father was in several concentration camps during World War II. They were lucky to have survived after having lost most of their immediate family.”

Her parent's values of hard work and determination to survive were apparent throughout their life. Katy shared how they passed these values on to her.

“My father came from a poor background. At the age of 8, he sold ice-cream on the street corner to help his parents financially. There was no opportunity to fulfill an education before the war. However, he had an innate ability to survive. My parents met after the war and migrated to Australia together in 1950. They were hard-working and never forgot the deprivation they experienced, which continually gave them the incentive to reflect on the lives of others who were less fortunate and in need.”



Pictured: Katy Honig's parents, Magdalena and Tobias Honig



Pictured: RMH Director of Nephrology, Professor Steve Holt, RMH Nephrology Surgeon, Dr Amanda Robertson and Senior Renal Scientist, Associate Professor Tim Hewitson.

Magdalena volunteered in hospitals and nursing homes throughout her life and took Katy to visit the elderly as a child.

Katy remembers how her values of kindness, community and philanthropy originated.

“My mother volunteered at the Alfred Hospital, visiting the inpatients weekly in the 1970s. There was one particular female patient that was scheduled for open-heart surgery. My mother continued her weekly visits stroking the lady’s arm and talking to her for the next eight months until she unfortunately passed away following surgery. As a child, I accompanied my mother to a nursing home to visit a blind lady and play chess with a 94-year-old gentleman. My father was a businessman. If customers were ever unable to pay their bills, my father was kind and always told them to pay him whenever they could.”

When Katy’s brother, Dennis, was born, the family experienced further challenges with his health, but they remained resilient. Katy reflected on key hospital influences within her and Dennis’ life.

“My older brother Dennis was born prematurely. The late Dame Kate Campbell was both Dennis and my paediatrician at The Royal Women’s Hospital. I was named Kate after Dame Kate Campbell, who saved our lives when my mother had a ruptured appendix in her 8th month of pregnancy. Associate Professor Kathy Nicholls is Dennis’

nephrologist today at The Royal Melbourne Hospital. There are not enough words of appreciation to express my gratitude for her hands-on approach, and wholehearted dedication and care for Dennis. The amazing and skilled Dr Amanda Robertson performed Dennis’ renal transplant in September 2011. As you can see, Dennis is surrounded by a lot of strong and talented women, including his beautiful wife Ida, who was also his renal donor. They will be approaching 40 years of marriage, and they continue to have good health.”

Katy expressed her gratitude for the care and treatment provided to Dennis and his extended family.

“We are very fortunate to have met the dedicated staff at The Royal Melbourne Hospital. The nephrology team are at the forefront of renal research, and I am very excited to see how this research evolves, with the hope of finding a cure in the future. The reason I have continued my parent’s philanthropy is to follow their legacy. They never took anything for granted, and in their memory, I am giving to renal research led by Professor Stephen Holt.”

Thank you, Katy, for allowing us to share your family’s story.

We are in awe of your kindness and generosity. Your desire to give back to nephrology research at The Royal Melbourne Hospital will instill hope and make a difference in the lives of many renal patients in Australia, and across the world.

Patient-centred research underway at Royal Park Campus

The Arthur A. Thomas Trust, managed by Peter J. Walsh & Equity Trustees has awarded RMH Divisional Director of Medicine and Community Care, Professor Andrea Maier, a grant to undertake research on ‘Pyjama Paralysis’ at the Royal Park Campus. ‘Pyjama Paralysis’ describes the negative physical and psychological effects experienced by hospital inpatients who spend prolonged time bedbound, inactive and in their pyjamas.

Forty-nine patients will participate from Geriatric Evaluation and Management (GEM) wards AC4 and AC3 at Royal Park Campus. This research aims to reduce functional decline in older hospital inpatients leading to fewer falls and pressure injuries by encouraging them to wear everyday clothes instead of pyjamas and to become more active in their healthcare journey.

With higher risk of infection, loss of muscle-strength and mobility, many patients lose the ability to independently perform routine daily activities like bathing, dressing, and walking. Bedbound patients lose 1-5% in muscle strength each day, which leads to longer hospital stays.

For older patients, this can mean the difference between dependence and independence; and going home or moving into a nursing-home. Professor Andrea Maier hopes to demonstrate the effectiveness of this model, so that it can be rolled out across all Geriatric Evaluation and Management wards at The Royal Melbourne Hospital.

Thank you to Arthur A. Thomas Trust and congratulations to Professor Andrea Maier and her team. The RMH Foundation looks forward to hearing the results of this very important research intervention and evaluation soon!



Pictured: Professor Andrea Maier is leading the research on Ending ‘Pyjama Paralysis’ at The RMH Royal Park Campus.



Pictured: The Rangers Club has been supporting The Royal Melbourne Hospital for over 24 years.

RMH Foundation Breast Cancer Lunch

In May, the RMH Foundation hosted a lunch for our Breast Cancer services patients and donors. During the lunch, Professor Bruce Mann discussed recent advancements in breast reconstruction and less invasive forms of breast cancer treatment. Patients, Debra Williams and Lilanthi Fernando shared their recovery journeys with breast cancer and expressed their gratitude to The RMH and Professor Bruce Mann for their successful treatment and care.

Long-term supporters of breast cancer research, The Rangers and the Treasure Chest Charity also attended the event. The Rangers are a group of 350 women mainly from North-East Victoria, who were formed in 1995. Since then, they have raised an amazing \$282,900 towards breast cancer research.

Treasure Chest founder, Pratika Lal, presented the RMH Foundation with a \$38,000 cheque for breast cancer equipment and projects undertaken by Professor Bruce Mann, and the shared Breast Service which operates across The RMH and the Royal Women's Hospital. Pratika successfully

overcame her battle with breast cancer twice. Her personal victory against cancer led her to create the Treasure Chest Charity, a volunteer-based charity that has raised over \$1 million for breast cancer projects and research.

The RMH Foundation is deeply thankful for the support from The Rangers and the Treasure Chest Charity. A big thank-you to all guests that attended as well! There was a strong response for this event, and for those that missed out on attending, Professor Bruce Mann will be speaking again at an RMH Public Lecture on October 30. To find out more, please contact the Foundation on **9342 7111** or sandie.baskin@mh.org.au.

Ground-Breaking Research funded by the Sylvia and Charles Viertel Charitable Foundation

The Viertel Clinical Investigator Awards were initiated by the Sylvia and Charles Viertel Charitable Foundation to assist new and upcoming researchers to establish their research programs.

Five awards of \$85,000 each are given annually, and RMH Clinical Immunologist, Dr Charlotte Slade was one of these successful recipients. Her research will focus on understanding the causes of Common Variable Immune Deficiency (CVID) and its complications in implementing targeted treatments.

CVID is one of the most common primary immunodeficiency diseases in Australia. People with CVID are highly susceptible to frequent and recurrent infections from bacteria and viruses, due to a weakened immune system from low antibody levels. Previous studies conducted have identified several families with changes in a gene called NFKB1, now known to be the most common single-gene cause of CVID.

However, in several other CVID families, changes in genes that work together with NFKB1 were also found. Dr Slade will study immune cells from these patients to determine its precise cause.

Currently, treatment for CVID is ongoing antibody replacement, which is useful for preventing infections, but not autoimmune complications. Standard treatments typically suppress the immune system and carry many potential risks for immunodeficient patients. Upon completion of the study, Dr Slade hopes to offer molecular diagnosis to patients and family members. It is expected that this research will result in a better understanding of the mechanisms of immune responses, inform management of the disease and lead to better, more targeted therapies.

The RMH Foundation enjoys working alongside such talented researchers across The Royal Melbourne Hospital and looks forward to hearing about the direct impact Dr Slade's work will bring to CVID patients, and Australian and global healthcare.

RMH Diabetes Research Achievements

Professor John Wentworth recently led The RMH Diabetes and Endocrinology team to complete a successful international trial on Type 1 diabetes prevention in children using a powerful antibody, Teplizumab.

There is currently only limited understanding of what causes Type 1 diabetes. Researchers know it is a lifelong condition and continue to search for a cure. Compared to the general population, children with family members living with Type 1 diabetes have a higher risk of developing the disease, and those detected with specific antibodies in their immune system have a 90 per cent chance of developing diabetes in the future.

The trial looked for increases in blood glucose levels in 76 children that were likely to develop Type 1 diabetes. They were then administered a ten-day Teplizumab injection regimen to reset their immune systems. Researchers were able to detect when the disease was imminent, and successfully delayed the disease within the children. This breakthrough research has paved the way in the field of diabetes prevention. The RMH Diabetes and Endocrinology Department now offers a 'Type1Screen' service to children and young adults to slow down the progression and impact of this lifelong disease.

A simple blood test is offered and will be able to predict whether you or your child will develop Type 1 diabetes. Early detection of Type 1 diabetes can help prevent serious physical health problems and bring about a better prognosis and management of the condition in the longer term. A negative test provides reassurance that the risk of diabetes is low. Two or more positive tests signal a need to look out for symptoms of diabetes and start insulin treatment before serious illness develops. A positive test will enable earlier commencement of an advanced treatment plan and in some cases the chance to participate in clinical trials and other research that will aim to prevent and find a cure for Type 1 diabetes.

In the Type 2 diabetes research space, we are happy to report The RMH Diabetes and Endocrinology team were successfully awarded \$100,000 by the Rowe Family Foundation in the 2019 Perpetual IMPACT Philanthropy program - a highly competitive grant round.

Perpetual is the trustee for approximately 1,000 charitable trusts and endowments, managing \$2.7 billion in philanthropic funds.

Each year, The Royal Melbourne Hospital treats an estimated 7,000 inpatients with diabetes. Diabetes impairs immunity and is recognised to be a significant risk factor for hospital acquired infection. During hospitalisation for surgery or acute medical illness, blood glucose often becomes unstable from stress hormone changes related to illness. Currently, the management of inpatient Type 2 diabetes

remains suboptimal due to multiple factors, including inadequate clinical experience in treating the many different forms of diabetes and frequent medication changes. Hospital acquired infection usually occurs within 48 hours after admission to hospital and in approximately six per cent of inpatients. Other complications can include adverse glycaemia, which can lead to arrhythmia, acute kidney injury, or death. Given these well documented adverse outcomes in people with diabetes, there is a real need for proactive models of inpatient diabetes care.

Supported by the Rowe Family Foundation, a randomised clinical trial will be led by Associate Professor Spiros Fourlanos. Utilising a proactive diabetes management plan as an intervention with acutely unwell, non-critical care patients with diabetes, the trial will be conducted over eight months across 12 non-critical care wards at The Royal Melbourne Hospital. It will utilise networked blood-glucose meter technology, and the 'Melbourne Glucose Alert Pathway', which electronically monitors ward blood glucose measures remotely, and prompts ward health professional staff to escalate for diabetes assistance. The study aims to improve ward staff responses, decrease hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose) and hyperglycaemia (high blood glucose) events, and decrease the incidence of hospital acquired infections.

Thank you to the Rowe Family Foundation and Perpetual for supporting The Royal Melbourne Hospital!

Congratulations to The RMH Diabetes and Endocrinology team. The RMH Foundation is delighted to work alongside this talented team who continues to conduct quality intervention programs that will inform national healthcare guidelines.



1 in 4 patients admitted to The Royal Melbourne Hospital have **diabetes**

To find out more about our Type1Screen service please visit <https://type1screen.org>. Alternatively, you can call (03) 9342 7063 or email Type1Screen@mh.org.au.

Pictured: Associate Professor Spiros Fourlanos is thankful to the Rowe Family Foundation managed by Perpetual.



Shedding the Stigma around Head and Neck Cancer

In May, the RMH Foundation shared the stories of three inspiring women to raise funds for head and neck cancer services and research at The Royal Melbourne Hospital.

Head and neck cancer usually occurs in older males, and common risk factors include smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol. However, in recent years, an increasing number of people without these risk factors are being diagnosed.

Approximately 3,170 men and 1,230 women are affected by head and neck cancer in Australia each year.

Cecilia Irvine had lots of plans for her young family when she was first diagnosed with head and neck cancer at the age of 38.

“It was a busy life, but it was a happy life. I thought for certain that I would never get cancer because I was a healthy person who didn’t smoke and hardly drank. I had several appointments trying to work out why I had a tongue ulcer that didn’t go away. Eventually, after nine months of symptoms, when they worked out what it was, that was the moment that everything changed.”

Lora Winter was on holiday with her family when she noticed an ulcer under her tongue.

“After a couple of weeks, it hadn’t healed, and it became a strain to talk. I looked in the mirror one day and noticed a white patch at the base of my tongue. I booked in to see a doctor, and I was lucky that they could begin treatment immediately.”

Gretchen Fox was 43 when she was diagnosed and just about to start a new job.

“Despite going to two dentists and two doctors to check an ulcer in my mouth- none of them were able to diagnose it.

Finally, the receptionist at the dentist suggested I see an oral surgeon. I went to see an oral surgeon, and was diagnosed in about five or six weeks after my ulcer appeared.”

When Cecilia shared her diagnosis of head and neck cancer with others in the community, she began to witness the lack of awareness and stigma surrounding this type of diagnosis.

“Despite going to two dentists and two doctors to check an ulcer in my mouth- none of them were able to diagnose it.”

“I first remember thinking I was going to die of a cancer I’d never heard of before. I started to become aware of a culture of blame around oral cancer, and noticed that people would almost fail to believe that you haven’t been a smoker.”

Cecilia always kept perfect dental hygiene before her diagnosis. Surgery for Cecilia meant the removal of most of her tongue, followed by aggressive treatment, including radiotherapy, which caused damage to one of her teeth.

“I carry toothpaste everywhere to protect my teeth from decay. It’s tough to forget that you’ve had cancer when you speak the way you speak and when you have to make constant adaptations to your diet. However, I needed to reclaim my life. I do a lot of public speaking for my job, and I’m now doing it better than I did it before.”

Cecilia’s parents, Margaret and David Irvine, expressed their gratitude to The Royal Melbourne Hospital by making a significant contribution towards head and neck cancer services and research.

“Thank you so much for the wonderful treatment and care provided to our daughter, Cecilia. We are so happy that she is well again.”

Our Head and Neck Cancer team, led by Professor David Wiesenfeld, hopes to conduct organoid research. This will involve taking samples of a patient’s cancer and replicating it within the Laboratory so that it can be tested with different types of drugs, chemotherapy and immunotherapy. The team can do this faster, and in parallel, and then use the best results to tailor treatment for the patient. They hope this will help them to understand this disease better and find new forms of treatment. They also wish for their research to improve doctors’ and dentists’ skills in early detection, as well as changing public perceptions.

The three wonderful ladies have since recovered and are continuing to help shift the narrative surrounding head and neck cancer. An outstanding \$30,500 for head and neck cancer services and research was raised for The Royal Melbourne Hospital. Funds have already been used towards establishing one of Australia’s first support groups for women with head and neck cancer. Thanks to our donors’ generosity, we can ensure our patients receive the very best in care at The Royal Melbourne Hospital.



Pictured: Cecilia Irvine, Gretchen Fox and Lora Winter are leading the way in the fight against head and neck cancer.



Vital research funded by the La Manna Family

Since November 2017, our custom-built RMH Mobile Stroke Unit (MSU) has been continuing to save lives and prevent the damaging long-term effects of stroke in patients across Melbourne. The MSU team usually consists of two paramedics, a CT radiographer, a stroke neurologist and a stroke nurse specialist.



Pictured L to R: Pat LaManna OAM has recently funded important projects and research at The RMH. Director of Neurology, Professor Mark Parsons

The Mobile Stroke Unit is dispatched by Ambulance Victoria to attend to patients with a suspected stroke within 20 kilometres of The RMH, Monday to Friday from 8 am to 6 pm. MSU staff then assess, scan and offer immediate treatment to stroke patients right on their doorsteps. Patients who receive treatment will then be monitored and transported by the MSU to their nearest stroke hospital. The Mobile Stroke ambulance holds a built-in CT scanner, and a full range of stroke treatment drugs, including blood clot-dissolving medications and drugs designed to stop bleeding into the brain. The vehicle also carries new research medications that aim to improve the outcomes from both bleeding and clotting strokes.

A newly appointed Nurse Research Coordinator has recently been hired to carry out a trial on the MSU, led by Director of Neurology, Professor Mark Parsons. This trial will compare newer clot-dissolving drug, Tenecteplase to see if it is better at unblocking arteries in clotting (ischaemic) stroke patients than the current drug in use, Alteplase. The trial will allow an average of 2 patients per week to be treated by this new drug, potentially helping 100 patients per year. Routine three-month follow-up checks would then be performed to measure outcomes on all patients treated with clot-dissolving drugs, including those treated on board the MSU, those having endovascular clot removal, and other patients at The RMH. This long-term follow-up will be a world first and hopes to capture outcomes such as patients' quality of life, mood and cognitive function, and the time taken to return to their usual activities or work. This research position was generously funded by ongoing philanthropic contributions from Pat La Manna OAM and Helen La Manna.

Mobile Stroke Units have shown to dramatically reduce the time that patients wait to receive treatment. They allow almost 50 per cent of patients to be treated within the first 60 minutes of their stroke starting. This gives patients the best chance to recover and minimises the amount of irreversible brain damage. The positive results of The RMH Mobile Stroke Unit (MSU) have been made possible due to the successful collaboration between Ambulance Victoria, The RMH, RMH Foundation, The Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health, National Stroke Foundation, RMH Neuroscience Foundation, the Victorian Government and the National Health and Medical Research Council.

“If successful, this clinical trial will increase knowledge on how to best treat depression in ageing patients living in the community.”

Another new drug trial also funded by philanthropic donations from the La Manna family will soon be conducted by Professor Nicola Lautenschlager within depression and mental health research. Psychosocial dysfunction such as impaired cognition and poor emotion processing are prominent in depression, especially within the ageing population (50–75 plus years). This is currently insufficiently addressed by existing depression treatments. A small randomised controlled trial will be completed on the drug, Vortioxetine, a new antidepressant drug recently approved for use in major depressive disorders in Australia. This project will be a pilot study that hopes to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of combining vortioxetine treatment with personalised psychological intervention as compared to stand-alone psychological intervention.

If successful, this clinical trial will increase knowledge on how to best treat depression in ageing patients living in the community. RMH staff employed in NorthWestern Mental Health as well as staff employed in the Department of Psychiatry, and University of Melbourne, will bring their diverse and multi-disciplinary skills together to collaborate on this research at the clinical trial centre in The RMH. This trial will also include national and international partnerships in Adelaide, and Muenster in Germany.

The RMH Foundation thanks Pat and Helen La Manna for funding vitally important translational research at The RMH which will help advance treatment and minimise the debilitating effects of stroke and mental illness within the Victorian community.

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