

CoRE of The Matter



NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE FOR
GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

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Contents

1. FROM THE DIRECTORATE
2. SCIENCE PLANNING DAY – 23 AUGUST
3. ROBERT WINSTON FUNDRAISING WEEK – 30 AUGUST – 4 SEPTEMBER
4. NRCGD WORKSHOP WITH ROBERT WINSTON – 3 SEPTEMBER
5. RECENT BOARD OF GOVERNANCE MEETING – 15 SEPTEMBER
6. CHIASMA OPENING – 16 SEPTEMBER
7. INTRANET DEVELOPMENTS
8. UPCOMING EVENTS
9. CONTACT

1. From the Directorate

The past month has seen a great deal of effort coming to fruition and forward momentum with regards to planning and organisation. The wheels are in motion for preparation of the second NRCGD Business Plan; contracts, budgets, and membership issues are all being fine-tuned, and Chiasma, the exciting new student career guidance programme has been successfully launched.

The highlight of the month was, of course, the visit of Lord Robert Winston. Visiting New Zealand as part of a week-long Fundraising effort, many people took the opportunity to discuss projects and ideas with Lord Winston who quite graciously listened and offered his thoughts and perspective. The NRCGD held a day long Workshop on Friday 3 September, and Lord Winston showed an interest in all of the various projects being undertaken by our researchers.

On a sad note, after only a short spell working with the NRCGD Team, we say farewell to Tracey Tarr who will be leaving us at the end of September. With continuing troubles trying to secure Work Visas and Residence applications, Tracey has regrettably not been able to obtain a new visa to continue her work in New Zealand. Her contribution will be greatly missed in many ways.

Please read on for further information on some of the month's highlights.

With best regards, Steve Hodgkinson

2. Science Planning Day - 23 August

The NRCGD has an annual Strategic / Business Planning and Reporting Cycle driven by the contractual requirement to submit a Business Plan in December and an Annual Report in April to TEC / MoE for approval. The Board has reasserted its commitment to adopting a strategic approach to resource allocation based on the merit and progress of projects rather than rote allocation of funding as per other science organisations.

A Science Planning Day was held involving Centre staff from across the country at the Liggins on the 23rd of August to review projects and propose refinements to direction for next year. All the Executive Committee was present, plus some other key investigators.

Each of the Major Project Leaders and Site Leaders (where they are different) provided short presentations on their current research projects and their value.

The meeting proved to be a great success in continuing to build collegiality and also to inform the business planning process. The outputs from science planning may lead to detail changes in project funding recommendations for next year and will be detailed in the Science Plan section of the '05 Business Plan expected to be in a draft form next month.

3. Robert Winston Fundraising Week

From 30 August until 4 September, Lord Robert Winston was in New Zealand for a week long fundraising event.

Lord Robert Winston is a fertility expert and charismatic BBC television presenter.



Paul Kenyon, Hugh Blair and Elwyn Firth chat with Robert Winston about NRCGD projects.

He will be recognised by many as presenter of the BBC television series ('The Human Body', 'The Human Mind', 'Superhuman' and most recently 'Child of Our Time') in which he brings science to life in an extremely engaging manner. His scientific credentials are also superb: he is a pioneer in the field of human development, fertility and reproduction. He is Professor of Fertility Studies at Imperial College, London, and a Life Peer of the House of Lords where he comments on a wide range of medical, ethical and scientific issues.

As a speaker, he captivates audiences. They often leave the venue buzzing about the latest reproductive technologies and the issues they raise. He was guest speaker at the Artworks Black Tie Dinner and Charity Auction on 4th September, and gave two public lectures on 2nd September at the Hilton Hotel entitled: "Creating Humans" and "Should the Public Trust Scientists". He also spoke to 600 high school students at St. Kentigern's

He is, of course, a member of the NRCGD Scientific Advisory Board, and as such many members of NRCGD staff were able to chat to him on his several visits to The Liggins Institute throughout the week. Very approachable and likeable, Sir Robert's presence gave a great boost to all those who were fortunate enough to chat with him.

4. NRCGD Workshop with Robert Winston – 3 September

A Workshop entitled "Influences of the periconceptual environment on future health and development" was held at The Liggins Institute on Friday 3 September.

The goal of the Workshop was to assist with the science planning of the NRCGD in the focusing and integration of research work within two major research areas, namely:

- Causes and consequences of low birth weight and
- Gene environment interactions in growth and disease

The day had a relaxed and informal atmosphere, with the expectation that each person would have an opportunity to present and outline the current focus of his/her research, followed by a short discussion.

The various presentations were as follows: The growth Hormone / IGF axis in children born prematurely (Wayne Cutfield); Metabolic consequences of prematurity (Paul Hofman); Potential long-term consequences of IVF conceptions (Harriet Miles); Effects of periconceptual undernutrition (Jane Harding); Why is there a negative genetic correlation between maternal and direct effects for birth weight (Hugh Blair); and Perspectives of an ART specialist (Richard Fisher).



Robert Winston gives his view at the NRCGD Workshop.

The workshop was well received by all researchers present, and the sharing of information and developments is, of course, key to the continuing success of the NRCGD.

After listening intently throughout the day, Lord Winston gave his synthesis and perspective on the day's presentations. He gave credit to the integrative and foresightful research being undertaken by the NRCGD investigators and left the workshop impressed with the NRCGD as a research system allowing investigators throughout the country to combine resources in pursuit of common goals.

5. NRCGD Board of Governance Meeting, The Liggins Institute, Auckland – 15 September.

The Centre's monthly Board meeting was hosted by the Liggins Institute, Auckland. Amongst various other topics the subject of CoRE Membership and its definition is currently undergoing consideration. Various levels of membership have been mooted and a discussion document is currently in preparation.

6. Chiasma Official Opening

Chiasma was officially launched on **Thursday, September 16** at the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland. With over 250 attendees at the launch event, including students and staff from the partnering faculties, investors and several members of the biotech industry, Chiasma got off to a stellar start. The group now moves into a second stage of implementing its 'stretch' goal of 'instigating an enterprise revolution in the biotech research community'. Guest speakers at the launch included:

- Professor Garth Cooper, New Zealander of the Year 2003, CEO and founder of ProteMix Corp, one of NZ's leading biotech firms
- Dr Simon Malpas, co-founder of the new start-up Telemetry Research (Winner of 2004 spark* \$40K Challenge)
- Dr Claire McGowan, Executive Director of the Auckland Biotech Chapter of NZ Bio.

What initially started as a concept for a mentoring and careers evening has now evolved to a fully-fledged scheme complete with career training, a biomedical innovation challenge called I-Volve, Biotech expos and numerous other networking opportunities. More than a hundred students have already joined Chiasma and more are expected to join following the launch.

The brainchild of Priv Bradoo, Swati Sharma and Daniel Sun, PhD students in the University of Auckland's Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Chiasma aims to foster an enterprising spirit amongst the biotech student community and build networks with the wider New Zealand biotech industry.

Chiasma^X
● The link in biomedical enterprise

Chiasma starts with a Careers Catalyst in October, a free two-day careers training workshop run by the University's Postgraduate Careers Centre. Those then taking up the I-volve Challenge go into win \$5000 and mentoring opportunities.

Two biotech expos are also in the pipeline. These expos along with Chiasma's close association with the newly formed Auckland Biotech Chapter of NZBio, will enable students to hear from industry experts and discuss recruitment options, explore internship opportunities, as well as become aware research taking place in the industry.

Chiasma is a student led initiative run in conjunction with its University of Auckland partners: the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, the School of Biological Sciences, the Bioengineering Institute and the Business School, and its foundation sponsor: the National Research Centre for Growth and Development.

The NRCGD will fill a strategic role in assisting Chiasma build a national network of biotechnology students.

For more information:

Membership of Chiasma is FREE. To register now and find out more, please visit our website:

www.chiasma.auckland.ac.nz , or contact:

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7. Intranet Developments

Following closely on the heels of the development of the NRCGD Website, the NRCGD Intranet will be created with different uses and objectives in mind. The website is aimed at communicating information to the public in general. It is a worldwide site which can be accessed by people to discover what the NRCGD is and does, who the major participants are, what research has been undertaken, and what breakthroughs have been made in our medical research.

The Intranet, however, is to be used as a "tool" which all scientists, researchers, and members involved with the NRCGD, will be able to access, so as to facilitate swift and efficient communication and transactions between parties.

A few of the functions to be established are:

- Contact Lists. To be created so that researchers throughout the country, can contact each other quickly and easily.
- Various templates. These templates can be downloaded and used by all researchers in the NRCGD for such things as PowerPoint Presentations, Posters, Letterheads and even Business Cards.

- Funding Applications. Forms to facilitate processes such as travel applications and pilot projects.
- "Chat Room". This facility will enable researchers to post a suggestion or research idea onto the Intranet for fellow researchers to review and offer suggestions. Once the page is in use we envisage that a large number of researchers will use this facility to post their ideas. It will promote a good exchange of information between researchers.
- Links. Set-up to enable the quick access of all NRCGD Sites, Collaborators and websites which might be of relevance.
- Student page. Highlighting Chiasma as a contact point for students.
- Newsletter. Copies of the CoRE of the Matter Newsletter, as well as contacts for and examples of adverts used when placing adverts for vacancies in newspapers, etc.
- Calendar of events. Keeping people posted of NRCGD Calendar events.

More pages will be added as they become apparent. The proposed completion date for the creation of the Intranet is 1 March 2005.

8. Upcoming Events

- 13/10/04. Official Opening of NRCGD Facilities in Christchurch
- CoRE Directors Meeting, Liggins Institute 06/10/04

9. Contact

Contributions to the next Newsletter are welcome and should be sent to Steve Hodgkinson (s.hodgkinson@auckland.ac.nz) by the second Friday of each month. If you would like to subscribe or unsubscribe to this newsletter or know of someone else who may want to receive a copy please contact s.hodgkinson@auckland.ac.nz