



Genomic Disorders Research Centre Newsletter

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STOP PRESS

Associate Director

Dr Ian Trounce, head of our Mitochondrial Genetics group, has agreed to accept the position of Associate Director of the GDRC. We look forward to his input to staffing issues and strategic positioning of the Centre.

Synchrotron

Victorian scientists are delighted and congratulate the State Government on the securing of the Synchrotron. The Synchrotron is a 110 metre diameter, giant molecular microscope to be built at a cost of \$157-million at Monash University. It is described by Sir Gustav Nossal as "an important new tool for scientific and industrial research, particularly in such areas as biotechnology, medical research, drug development, minerals technology, microelectronics and others"¹. As Victoria hosts 40% of Research and Development particularly biotechnology, the location of a national facility in Victoria is most appropriate. It will give the State a huge boost, creating up to 700 jobs and revenue up to \$75-million per annum.

Staffing and Students

Executive Officer

May 25 was **Stuart Douglas's** last day as the GDRC Executive Officer. Whilst he is still working on the 7th Floor, he has rejoined the 'corporate world' and is now working with Cytopia. Part of the agreement of his transfer to Cytopia is that he will still be available to the GDRC for up to two days per week, if necessary, whilst our new Executive Officer, Heather Howard, learns the ropes of the position. This means that we will still be seeing him around for some time, until Cytopia relocates later in the year.

We welcomed our new Executive Officer, **Heather Howard**, on May 28. Heather has had much experience in working with not-for-profit organisations and did her first fundraising at the age of 16. She is familiar with the ethic of research centres and has run organisations such as the Wilderness Society and the National Council of Massage and Allied Health Practitioners. We are enjoying working with Heather and look forward to many productive years

Visitors/Collaborators/Projects

In June we welcomed **Professor Mireille Claustres** for two months as our visiting professor, sponsored by a grant from the University of Melbourne. Mireille, who is in charge of a major DNA diagnostic reference laboratory in Montpellier, France, came here to work on the specific project of looking at the various mutation databases with Rania. She has been very productive, being glued to the computer from before dawn to well after dusk. It has been stimulating having her here.



Professor Mireille Claustres working on the Mutation Database

We also welcomed **Dr Peter George** from Auckland for a visit on June 4. Peter is interested in the capture of mutations from diagnostic laboratories.

Seminars

Dr Ian Radford and **Dr Ivan Bertonecello**, both from the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute, presented individually at the joint lecture series that we organised jointly with the Melbourne Neuromuscular Research Institute.

Grants/Refurbishments/Donations/Equipment

Sequencer

For the past five years we have been fortunate to have the Australian Genome Research Facility (AGRF) ABI 377 Sequencer located here. It was recently felt that it could be better utilized in a different location. Fortunately we were able to justify the purchase of our own second hand equivalent machine with previously committed funds.

MDI

Rania and Dick and our overseas collaborators have been hard at work on the NIH grant for the Mutation Database Initiative (MDI) (see previous newsletter). We also put in an expression of interest on the same topic to the Ramaciotti Foundation.

Travel Scholarship

We were pleased a University of Melbourne *Melbourne Abroad Postgraduate Travelling Scholarship* of \$1000 was awarded to Andy Lambrinakos to assist with her travel to the Bled workshop.

Trips/Conferences/Talks/Visits

Sixth Mutation Detection Workshop

Andy Lambrinakos, Chinh Bui and Dick Cotton travelled to the Sixth Mutation Detection Workshop in Bled (July 3 to 7). En route Dick visited Los Angeles regarding our new Intellectual Property and also attended the HUGO meeting in Edinburgh (report attached). It was voted that the next HUGO International meeting be located near the Great Barrier Reef, as a satellite meeting of the International Congress of Genetics to be held in Melbourne in 2003.

Technology Launch

Dick Cotton attended the launch of the new technology precinct and synchrotron at Monash University, which will host start-ups companies and basic research.

Publicity/Publications/Patents/Agreements

Editorial Board

Dick Cotton was invited to join the editorial board of another two journals and we have now received first issues of each. One is the new journal *Pharmacogenomics* from the prestigious Nature (MacMillan) stable. The other is *Disease Markers*, recently revamped by Sudhir Srinivasta from the NIH in Washington. Anyone wishing to use our copies of these journals in our library is welcome to do so.

Board/Foundation/Fundraising/Administration

“Science at the Top” Cocktail Party

On May 29 we hosted about 50 guests to our cocktail party “Science at the Top” held in the excellent facilities on the 11th Floor of the new St Vincent’s Hospital. Professor Dick Wettenhall, Interim Director Bio 21 and Dr Andy Gearing, CEO Biocomm International, addressed us on the topics of Bio21 and biotechnology development respectively.



Professor Dick Wettenhall (above left) and Dr Andy Gearing (above right) addressing guests at “Science at the Top”

Jack Brockhoff Foundation

On June 4 we hosted an afternoon for representatives of the Jack Brockhoff Foundation including Chairman, Mr James Guest. The event celebrated the completion of the refurbishment of the north wing, the former CSD, made possible by the generous support of the Brockhoff Foundation. Following brief individual presentations by group leaders, James Guest AM, OBE and our board chairman Rob Clements, ‘unveiled’ a commemorative plaque.



Mr James Guest unveils the plaque for the refurbished wing.

Consultants

Root Australia Limited was the consultant chosen to investigate collaboration with the Howard Florey, Mental Health, Melbourne Neuromuscular and Aging Research Institutes along with ourselves. Meetings between Root and leaders of the research institutes have begun. This may lead to rehousing, sharing of infrastructure, facilities, equipment etc.

Meetings

Our board meeting was held on June 18, preceded by the statutory AGM. Dick Cotton also attended the regular University of Melbourne Institute Directors meeting.

¹Risk and Reward, Issue Number 4, Dept State and Regional Development



(l to r) Penny Broome, Rob Clements (GDRC Chairman) and Libby Cornell at "Science at the Top"

Director's Trip Report April 10 to May 9, 2001 Los Angeles – Edinburgh- Slovenia

The primary reason for this trip was the Human Genome Organisation (HUGO) International Human Genome Meeting (HGM) in Edinburgh, followed by the HUGO Mutation Database Initiative (MDI) meeting, also in Edinburgh, and then the Sixth International Symposium on Mutation Detection in Bled, Slovenia.

My first stop, however, was in Los Angeles where I met with a potential consultant for our soon-to-be-launched commercial activities as well as a major diagnostic company interested in using our methods.

After a short visit to the HUGO office in London, I chaired a session on Mutation Detection at the HUGO HGM Edinburgh meeting. The key value of this meeting was, I believe, the discussions with commercial company representatives and scientific colleagues. The most important outcome of the visit was a consequence of the HUGO MDI meeting whereby a consortium was formed to fulfill a rare invitation by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), USA, to submit a major grant application to fund our activities. If this grant application is accepted then we will be part of a major international collaboration.

Between meetings, my wife Libby, and I enjoyed a 9-day holiday in Italy, which included my talk on Mutation Databases at the Hospital in Cuneo, near Turin.



Dinner in Bled – l to r Metka Ravnik-Glavac, Dick Cotton and Libby Cotton

We then traveled to Bled in Slovenia for the latest of a series of meetings begun by myself in Oxford in 1991. This meeting was the culmination of much organization and co-ordination over the past year by myself and Damjan Glavac, a Slovenian scientist, my staff and HUGO London. We were pleased to provide and attract top scientists, science, scientific companies and organization in a superb venue, surrounded by magnificent scenery. Exciting menus and social activities made it a memorable occasion for all. Besides the latest ideas in technology being brought to the Mutation Detection meeting, two key discussion sessions took place. One with a company interested in commercializing our latest patent, the other was between eight or so heads of diagnostic laboratories to develop a plan to capture and document human disease mutations out of diagnostic laboratories worldwide, in order that the mutations do not lie in patient records, unknown to others.



Dick Cotton addressing the meeting in Bled

Dr Chinh Bui, GDRC chemist, and our PhD student Andreana Lambrinakos (Andy), also attended the meeting in Bled. Andy attracted University of Melbourne funds which covered some of her costs. The majority of my own costs were covered. We are hoping that there will some funds forthcoming from our involvement in the organization of the Bled meeting.

R G H Cotton

