



Newsletter of *Using our Brains* Donor Program Issue 23 August 2009



New Director

After more than a decade at the helm as director of *Using our Brains* and the NSW TRC, Professor Clive Harper has stepped down from their day-to-day running. Clive recently retired from RPA where he was Professor of Neuropathology, a position he has held since 1985. Clive will continue to be closely involved with the TRC and perform pathological characterisation of donated tissues. In addition, he will continue to represent the TRC at national and international conferences and advise those interested in undertaking human brain research. With fewer demands on his time Clive is looking forward to pursuing his love of the great outdoors, on land and sea.

The role of director has been taken up by Professor Jillian Kril. Jillian is Professor of Neuropathology at The University of Sydney and she and Clive have worked together for many years. During this time they undertook much of the early work on the neuropathology of alcohol-related brain damage. More recently Jillian's interests have been in the area of cognitive disorders, however she retains a strong interest in quantitative techniques in neuropathology and brain banking. She is the former chairperson of the NSW Scientific Advisory Committee for the Australian Brain Donor Programs and immediate past president of the Australian and New Zealand Society for Neuropathology.

This change in leadership, together with a few new staff, means there will be some minor modification to the operations of the donor program. However many familiar faces will remain ensuring a smooth transition to this new phase of *Using our Brains*.

Annual Update

We are currently updating our records and would appreciate it if you could complete the attached annual contact form and return it to us. There is no need to complete the update if you have had an assessment this year and your details have not changed since then.

Conference News

Attendance at this year's Research Society on Alcoholism meeting in San Diego USA, provided us with the opportunity to present data about this program. We also met with our grant manager, Antonio Noronha, and other researchers. There were over 1,500 attendees from around the world. Our brain bank was highlighted in a number of presentations including a plenary lecture from the 2009 RSA Distinguished Researcher, Howard Edenberg of Indiana University School of Medicine. Howard acknowledged the quality of the brain bank and its importance to their research. He and his team are investigating variations in gene expression and their influence on risk factors for alcoholism. Positive response from the international research community is encouraging to our staff and reflects well on your commitment as donors.

Alcohol is part of most societies and the effects of use and misuse were the focus of this meeting. Topics included: pathology; genetics; health and social harms; behaviour and cognition; treatment; and underage drinking. Many countries, including Australia, have experienced a rise in binge drinking by adolescents and this was a major focus of the meeting.

One of our long-standing collaborators, Professor Fulton Crews from the University of North Carolina School of Medicine, presented work on neurogenesis; the formation and development of nerve cells. Using

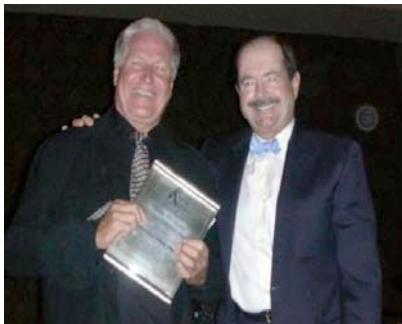
animal models he showed that neurogenesis occurs throughout life and that alcohol suppressed and reduced this cell proliferation mechanism. Furthermore, his findings showed that the combination of **regular exercise and abstinence** reversed this suppression. The group have also performed studies on human brain tissue indicating similar changes. While listening to his presentation, we all agreed that we needed to include more exercise in our routine but we're not sure about that mouse wheel!

Results from a subset of donor assessments were presented at the conference. Robyn Miller undertook a review of the alcohol consumption of those aged 60 to 89 years. The findings showed that most participants were current drinkers (82%), with 9.4% being current abstainers and 8.6% lifetime abstainers. The majority drank less than two standard drinks on a daily basis with over 60% preferring wine. Those engaged in risky drinking (i.e. more than four standard drinks per occasion), were more likely to be in the 60 to 69 year age range.

The relationships between alcohol consumption and performance on assessment tasks were explored. This showed that working memory and the ability to generate words was affected by the number of years donors had consumed alcohol.

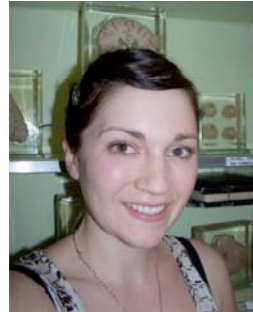
Awards

Professor Clive Harper was presented with the 3rd Annual Henri Begleiter Award for Excellence in Research at a rewarding presentation evening. This award is given to an individual demonstrating innovation or creativity and excellence in their research and/or whose work has a major impact on the field. It was a proud moment to hear Clive's many achievements praised before such a distinguished assembly.



Professor Harper receiving his award from RSA President, Peter M Monti

In addition, Antonio Noronha, was awarded this year's RSA Seixas Award for Service. He is another distinguished researcher who praises the quality of brain tissue from our bank.



Who's Who?

Juliette Gillies

Donor Liaison Officer

I would like to introduce myself as the *Using our Brains* Donor Liaison Officer, a position I have held since May 2009. I have been affiliated with the UoB since 2006, while employed by the Schizophrenia Research Institute working on their *Gift of Hope* brain donor program. After graduating from university I worked in information technology, finance and human resources. Since joining the brain donor team I have found my interactions with donors and researchers alike to be extremely rewarding. I am passionate about the research that is being conducted and inspired by the generosity of the donors. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your continued support and look forward to our future contact.

Farewell and Best Wishes

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to have been associated with *Using our Brains* since the early days in 2002, and gratifying to see the program prosper. I cannot leave without saying goodbye to some very special people, our donors. Without you there would be no *Using our Brains*! My greatest joy has been my contact with you and I wish the program, and especially you wonderful people, all the best for the future. I shall miss you.

Helen Blake, Volunteer

Thank you Helen

Thank you Helen for your hard work and dedication over these past eight years. You will be missed by all of us and we wish you the very best for the future.

The UoB team
