

# ACPSEM NZ Branch Newsletter

December 2008



*Heavens above! Its Auckland Hospital Medical Physics staff*

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## *From the Chair*

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2008 has been a significant year of progress for the ACPSEM. The college has supported Medical Physicist accreditation across all specialties and developed a framework for Australasian registration for our profession. Registration is a significant milestone that will consolidate the professional standing of our college.

Incorporation of the ACPSEM NZ Branch as a society will be concluded early in the New Year following email ratification of the new branch rules. The rule changes are necessary to allow our branch to become an incorporated society.

The NZ Branch continues to nurture the TEAP Medical Physics Registrar training programme extending the contract with the NZ TEAP national coordinator, John Turner. The branch has also extended funding to John to maintain his vital coordination of national TEAP activities and mentoring of registrars. The Ministry of Health is currently finalising national funding for the coordinator's role through a contracting arrangement within the District Health Board structure. The ministry has agreed to fund the co-ordinator's role up to one FTE, with CME and travel expenses.

A few nominations were received to initiate specialty-based subcommittees

to review the college's role within New Zealand's radiation protection legislation. It is imperative that the branch engages in this process to enhance the valuable contribution that members make towards the maintenance of an effective radiation protection framework and culture in New Zealand. The changes will likely be incorporated into guidance notes for professionals engaged in radiation protection when the replacement radiation protection act comes into being and the current codes of safe practice are withdrawn from use.

I would like to pass on my thanks to the 2008 NZ Branch committee and in particular, John Turner (secretary), Brian Lunt (past Chairperson), Mark Dirksen (Treasurer), and ACPSEM NZ Branch committee members. The effective operation of the branch is, however, only possible with the ongoing support and hard work of its members.

The branch committee would like to offer our thanks to the [EPSM-ABEC 2008](#) conference organising committee for the hard work in making the conference a success.

We look forward to the new branch chairman, Richard Dove, and vice chairman, Juergen Meyer taking the helm in 2009. I wish the branch committee well for the next term of office.

***Matthew Paris***

*Retiring Chair NZ Branch, Dunedin Hospital*

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## *News from Christchurch*

Christchurch bade farewell to Richard Tremewan mid year after a lengthy stint

at the helm. The Christchurch Medical Physics & Bioengineering Department



***The Christchurch EPSM 2008 organising committee***

owes Richard a lot for his twenty years of battling to keep the department intact through various threats. His unique combination of skills, training and humour will be difficult to replace. Richard Dove has been steering the ship in the interim whilst more permanent decisions are made.

Richard's departure seems to have opened the floodgates to a steady flow of departures. Ian Honey decided to

return to the UK after an all-too short stay, and Jenny Lydon has returned to Australia to do more physics and less managing. At the opposite extreme Brian Temple left our mechanical workshop after 42 years service. And just recently John Turner has called his five years part time clinical supervisor role to a close, although we hope to continue seeing John as the national TEAP coordinator. John and many of

his charges from around the country can be seen hard at work below.

Inevitably recruiting into so many vacancies has taken some time but we are now starting to see some arrivals to offset the departures. Mary Aerts has joined the department from WA (although from Christchurch much earlier) to provide some short term support for the radiation safety role. More permanent reinforcements arrive early in the New Year.

The Christchurch organising committee of EPSM-ABEC has breathed a sigh of relief after a busy year. The conference went well from our perspective with very high attendance numbers (making Christchurch the largest EPSM-ABEC to date) and a largely smooth event. We hope it was rewarding and enjoyable for those who attended.

***Richard Dove***



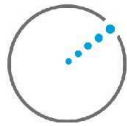
***TEAP Coordinator John Turner and his band of Merry Registrars at EPSM 2008***

### ***News from Auckland***

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The most important breaking news to share with you all is that the physics team have just won the annual Christmas Decorations competition in

our department! The first year we enter and we take the top prize! What can I say...?



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# DIRECT ACCESS



Carolyn Kardos, Senior Dosimetrist at Christchurch Hospital, jumps into the next generation of RTP!



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As you can see we have found yet another use for the old accelerator boat, only this time cunningly disguised as a nativity scene. With the finishing touches of a flashing star formed by a block mounting tray and the 3 wise physicists bringing gifts of iodine, a software upgrade and an IMRT phantom, what more could anyone wish for?!!

And now to personnel changes: This has become something of a running joke up here now, but yes we have managed to swap a C.M. Thompson for a C.M. Thompson yet again!! Christine and family have very sensibly decided to return to these shores again after a year back in the UK, but unfortunately this has meant that in order to maintain the conservation of C.M. Thompsons, Chris has returned back to Leeds! Chris and Jenny will be expecting their first-born in February and we wish them all the best for commissioning the first child...maybe one day we will attempt to upset the first law of C.M. Thompson conservation and entice them back to this side of the world, who knows! We also have seen the return of Jonathan Downs after his year in Christchurch completing his MSc course, and he is now eagerly finding his feet in the department as our 5th registrar! Siva Sarasanandarajah left us a couple of weeks ago to go with his family to

Adelaide where he will have the opportunity to finish off his registrar training.

I suppose I should turn to work issues now... We have just completed the commissioning of another replacement linac which has been clinical now for about a month. This machine is a Varian iX with 6MV photons, 5 electron energies and on board kV imaging. IMRT for our head and neck patients is now off the ground and we have a couple of patients to start in the New Year. Because the EPSM conference was in Christchurch this year a good number of us were able to attend. Deirdre and myself were there along with all 5 registrars, and I think everyone found this to be a very interesting few days.

But that's enough of that, back to the fun stuff, and...the Annual Oncology Scavenger Hunt! Yet another gloriously hot sunny day dawned for 13 teams to zoom around

Auckland dressed up in ridiculous costumes in pursuit of the prestigious scavenger hunt title. Hence Father Film-Badge and the Physi-sisters were born (Sister-matic, Sister Marie-Curie and Sister Sievert: - we're having a bit of a religious interlude up here!). All of us were under the watchful guidance of Mother Superior-Inferior Wedge, aka Isla, so we had to be careful not to sin too much. I think we were a bit of a sight to behold as we ran through a local shopping centre trying to find



***Auckland's decommissioned linear accelerator "boat" lives on – this time as a prize winning Nativity Scene (don't blame me for this stuff! – Ed)***

answers to clues with flowing black cloth behind us! Even more so when we were sitting at red traffic lights whilst pulling the string to make the cross go up on top of the car whilst turning to

bless all the surrounding cars!! With the 'holy water phantom' at our side as the team mascot, a very good fun day was had by everyone. Bless you all!

**Fiona Bignell**

## ***News from Dunedin***

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Well, how can you follow that? I don't know what's going on up there in Auckland, what with creating prize-winning Nativity scenes and rushing around in fancy dress frightening unsuspecting members of the public. I know it was probably their day off (but that's hardly an excuse) and what's more, I want to know what they have for breakfast up there, because, whatever it is, *we need to know about it.*

Anyway, here in Dunedin hospital things are much more respectable – well, err, mostly, if you discount certain fairly recent newsworthy events but we can't all be tarred with the same brush, can we? With sentencing in mind, then, Matthew's 2-year stint as ACPSEM NZ Branch chairperson ended over the New Year with the baton being handed over to new Chairperson elect Richard Dove of Christchurch. We wish Richard well and good luck with his new role at the helm of the Branch.

Liquid isotope brachytherapy seems to be on the rise here again (oh dear!) with the introduction of Yttrium-90 injections to treat knee synovitis caused by rheumatoid arthritis. We are also taking part in a clinical trial for Sirtex SIR-Spheres. This is a colloidal suspension of bio-compatible microspheres containing Y-90 and is used for treating hepatic tumours.

On the staff side, we were sad to see our locum physicist Stanley Carswell leave in December. Having been retired from Medical Physics for a few

years, Stanley decided to reignite his brain cells with a 6 month "working break" with us. Stanley's wealth of knowledge and experience (gained mostly through a 25ish-year stint working as a solo physicist in a radiotherapy centre in South Africa) proved very valuable to us and we will miss both his professional contribution and the many tearoom discussions brought on by his extensive knowledge of geography and world history. We have appointed a physicist from Europe to fill Stanley's position and he will hopefully be taking up post in September.

Recent conference attendees include Matthew Paris, Jonathan Griffin and Stanley Carswell to EPSM 08, and Mark Holmes to RADaim 08 at the Gold Coast in May. RADaim was a multi-disciplinary meeting covering a wide range of topics relating to the use of radiation imaging in medicine and was general enough to be aimed at all clinical staff groups. The meeting seemed to be designed to provide a teaching/where are we now? type approach with the radiotherapy sessions consisting of a series of lectures/seminars given by a smallish number of expert and accomplished speakers. It was no surprise that IGRT dominated the subject matter, with various aspects such as errors and margins, imaging doses, fiducials and image registration, physics of CBCT, motion management etc etc all getting a look in. I found the meeting very useful and would recommend this year's repeat performance, RADaim 09

at Melbourne in August, to physicists and RT's in other centres who are

already carrying out IGRT or planning to do so.

**Mark Holmes**

### ***New Tertiary Courses in Medical Physics and Biomedical Engineering – A Warning from the College***

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In the last two years we have become aware of new degrees in our professional areas being proposed by New Zealand universities.

The first of these is the 4-year BTech degree in Medical Physics and Imaging Technology offered by Auckland University. While the name of the degree gives the impression that a graduate will know a good deal about medical physics and imaging and therefore find it easy to get admission to the ACPSEM TEAP programmes, this is not the case. The BTech Medical Physics and Imaging Technology programme gives students a stronger anatomy and physiology background than is necessary for a medical physicist, and it does touch on some imaging and radiation oncology physics material. However the core physics is less than is required for entry to TEAP.

The College became aware that Auckland University was proposing this degree too late in the approval process to have any influence on altering the content to make it more acceptable. Auckland's proposal gave the clear impression that they had consulted with the College in developing their proposal, but it turned out that they had just had a chat with a member of the College and certainly didn't have our endorsement. Since then Isla Nixon has been approached by the BTech Medical Physics and Imaging Technology coordinator regarding a student who wanted to carry on into TEAP from the BTech. The extra papers that we identified that the student would be required to pass seemed to be difficult to do as the prerequisites couldn't be easily met.

Basically, Auckland University now have a Medical Physics and Imaging Technology degree that doesn't lead the graduates into a career in clinical medical physics in New Zealand!

We would be pleased if Auckland University would approach the College to develop the BTech so that the graduates do have a pathway into TEAP, but as yet they have not come back to us.

The second is a BE(Hons) majoring in Bionics (essentially biomedical electronics) recently proposed by Auckland University of Technology. This degree seems to be lacking sufficient biomedical electronics, control theory, electro-optics, medical image and signal processing to be a solid degree in bionics. Fortunately we became aware of this earlier in the approval process. After a bit of pressuring, AUT asked the college to review its proposal. So a panel was established that looked at the programme and discussed it with AUT. Our concerns have been conveyed to AUT and to the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) that approves degree proposals. At this stage we have withdrawn their proposal. Hopefully, AUT will resubmit the proposal after allowing allowing us to provide them with advice and develop an excellent degree programme that will produce useful graduates.

If any of you become aware that any tertiary educational provider is proposing a programme in any of the areas that come under the ACPSEM umbrella, then let the College know as soon as possible. Contact either the NZ

Branch Education Spokesperson (Howell Round) or the Chair of ACPSEM Professional Standards Board (Sean Geoghegan) so that we can check what is happening. If the proposers ring you up for comments or to check if there is any 'market' for the graduates, make it very clear to them that any comments you make are your own and are not to be taken as providing the College's point of view.

Also, I have come across some highly distorted claims by proposers of what

they have been told by College members.

Tertiary education providers tend to be overly enthusiastic when setting up new programmes and often these are not well thought out. Altering a programme once it is approved is almost impossible, but early intervention can result in better educational offerings that lead to careers in medical physics and biomedical electronics.

***Howell Round***