



MESOTHELIOMA SYMPOSIUM, SYDNEY

The iMig-NCARD Mesothelioma Symposium, held at Sydney's Novotel on Darling Harbour on Saturday 26 October 2013, attracted up to 100 participants. A satellite to the World Conference on Lung Cancer, we were delighted to welcome speakers and guests from the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Ireland, Finland, Switzerland, Canada and South Africa. As well as leading scientists and clinicians in the fields of immunotherapy, proteomics, genomics, biomarkers, animal models, cell biology and mesothelioma treatment, we were also privileged to be joined by three true veterans in the fight against asbestos-related diseases: Robert and RoseMarie Vojakovic and Dr Greg Deleuil from the Western Australian office of the Asbestos Diseases Society.

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SYMPOSIUM PARTICIPANTS LISTEN TO PRESENTATION, NOVOTEL DARLING HARBOUR SYDNEY

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GIRLS FROM THE GOLDEN WEST.
FROM LEFT: SOPHIE SNEDDON, ROSS DIVETT PHD SCHOLARSHIP STUDENT, NCARD; DR SALLY LANSLEY, LUNG INSTITUTE OF WA

CONGRATULATIONS AGAIN BRUCE!

For the Director of NCARD, it has been a year of unexpected recognition for a remarkable and diverse career.

In January, Professor Bruce Robinson AM was made a Member of the Order of Australia. In June he was named West Australian of the Year, a huge honour by which he was especially touched. And now, at a function on 9 November 2013 Bruce has been named WA Australian of the Year.

On the Australia Day Long Weekend in late January 2014, Bruce and his wife Jacqui will travel to Canberra for a ceremony with the finalists for Australian of the Year from each Australian State and Territory, the Prime Minister, Mr Tony Abbott, and the Governor-General, Her Excellency, the Honourable Quentin Bryce. Our sincere best wishes go with Bruce. For news of the finalists and other awardees, visit australianoftheyear.org.au



BRUCE ROBINSON AM WITH HIS AWARD FOR WA AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR, 9 NOVEMBER 2013

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The symposium was typically informal, with plenty of time allocated for questions and discussion. A number of participants commented on the refreshing openness and frankness of this approach.

The proceedings closed with an inviting glimpse from Jim Te Water Naude of the 2014 iMig Conference, to be held in Capetown, South Africa.

Early evening drinks overlooking Sydney's skyline were followed by a dinner at a nearby Italian restaurant on the King St Wharf, opposite the Maritime Museum of Australia. At this point I must confess that Matthew and I, in time-honoured Australian tradition, spent part of the dinner frightening our American guests with tales of goannas and funnel web spiders. Bill Richards from Harvard Medical School, had meticulously planned a cliffside walk that had nearly had to be cancelled due to the bushfires, so we felt it our patriotic obligation. (Jim sat back, quietly thinking of all the warnings and stories he will be able to make about South African wildlife of all kinds).

The day after the symposium brought a reminder about how many people are touched by asbestos related disease. At breakfast I introduced Bruce Robinson to another Bruce I had met: he and his wife were being treated by their family to a weekend in Sydney to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary. They had visited his workplace of more than a decade: historic Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour, once a naval base and shipbuilding yard. Thus, the elder Bruce told us, a number of his former colleagues had been lost to mesothelioma.



DINNER AL FRESCO, KING STREET WHARF. ROBERT AND ROSE MARIE VOJAKOVIC AND DR GREG DELEUIL ON LEFT, WITH DR TAKAO MOROHOSHI ON RIGHT



THEY GROW HOW BIG? MELISSA CULLIGAN FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA CAN'T BELIEVE WHAT SHE'S HEARING

BILL RICHARDS HAS HEARD ABOUT AUSTRALIAN GOANNAS THAT SIT ON PEOPLE'S HEADS: HE ISN'T TAKING ANY CHANCES ON HIS COASTAL WALK. (PHOTO COURTESY BILL RICHARDS)



WE WEREN'T FIBBING ABOUT THOSE REPTILES! (PHOTO COURTESY BILL RICHARDS)

CRACKING THE CODE OF MESOTHELIOMA

The building industry loses members to mesothelioma at a tragic rate. One family's personal loss is now being marked with a generous donation from both a building company that is a West Australian household name, and the Housing Industry Association's Charitable Foundation. The funds will enable cutting edge genomic research.

On 4 December at the Housing Industry Association (HIA) office in Osborne Park, Professor Bruce Robinson accepted a \$400,000 donation. This comprised \$325,000 from Dale and Jan Alcock and building group Alcock Brown-Neaves (ABN); donated through the HIA Charitable Foundation; \$50,000 directly from the HIA Charitable Foundation thanks to its fundraising efforts, and \$25,000 from WA Charity Direct, an organisation with involvement from many ABN Group employees and executives.

Dale Alcock's family owned a building company and hardware supplier in the West Australian Wheatbelt town of Kellerberrin. Dale's father Dennis, a bricklayer and builder, died three years ago from mesothelioma. (Dale's mother, brother and himself, as with many family companies in the building trade, all regularly handled and were exposed to asbestos, and are aware that, with the long latency of asbestos related disease, they also face potential danger).

NCARD Senior Researcher Dr Jenette Creaney, explains the mesothelioma genome sequencing project:

"All cancers arise because of alterations in a person's DNA. Recent high throughput sequencing and associated technologies provide an opportunity to examine the genetic make-up of mesothelioma at an unprecedented level. A joint project will be undertaken by the National Centre for Asbestos Related Disease and the Queensland Centre for Medical Genomics to determine the changes that have occurred in the sequence of over three billion DNA building blocks that make up a person's genetic blueprint, which have resulted in cancer.



RON DWYER, CHAIR OF THE HIA CHARITABLE FOUNDATION; ALICE POOLEY, SIR CHARLES GAIRDNER HOSPITAL MEDIA RELATIONS; PROF BRUCE ROBINSON, DR JENETTE CREANEY, DALE ALCOCK

Determining the genetic sequence of one tumour is an expensive and labour intensive process that generates over two terabytes (1000 000 000 000 bytes) of data per sample. Identifying the patterns that occur and common features of the tumour generating process will require the sequencing of many cases. It is hoped that through identifying the changes that have occurred in mesothelioma new therapeutic strategies can be devised to target these changes and improve patient outcomes.

Similar studies are being undertaken in many different tumour types particularly the common tumours of breast cancer, colon cancer and lung cancer, but as yet little work has been done in mesothelioma. In lung cancer the identification of changes in specific genes has improved the use of specific targeted therapies to those patients that will benefit most.*

We are very grateful indeed for being given the funds to be able to embark on this exciting investigation.

MOVE TO HARRY PERKINS BUILDING

From 13 December 2013, NCARD will be moving to the new Harry Perkins Building at the QEII site in Nedlands. Postal and email addresses will remain the same, phone numbers will need to be advised. As part of the University of Western Australia, we will be closed for the Christmas and New Year break from midday 24 December 2013, reopening 6 January 2014. We wish you all a safe, peaceful and joyful festive season.

Rod and Chris Triplett

For over a year we have had the privilege of spending time with Rod and Chris Triplett. Rod is a successful home builder from Australind who was diagnosed with mesothelioma two years ago, and Chris is his devoted wife and indefatigable support. Two of the most cheerful and positive people one could hope to meet, they have generously shared their experiences with us, as well as with the Housing Industry Association (HIA): Rod also met up with Dale Alcock at the HIA's Bunbury office in October to publicise the HIA Charitable Foundation's fundraising efforts, which are benefitting NCARD's research projects.

Chris and Rod recently joined NCARD research staff for morning tea, both as a thank you, and to give both the Triplett's and the researchers an opportunity to ask frank questions. The research team were impressed by their warmth and positivity.

Chris and Rod appear in the short film made about NCARD in 2012, while Rod also shared the story of his exposure to asbestos, and his diagnosis with mesothelioma, on a film made on "wobbly cam" in Bruce's office. (Rod's directness and candour more than makes up for any lack of technical panache). For those and other short films, please go to ncard.org.au/videos.html

“And as years went by we had circular saws and hand saws to cut it ...and all the fibres would just go everywhere. We didn't know about using masks, we didn't use masks. Sometimes we put our hankie around our nose to stop breathing in the dust but generally we just held our breath.”



DALE ALCOCK (LEFT) WITH ROD TRIPLETT. (PHOTO COURTESY THE SOUTH WESTERN TIMES)



ROD AND CHRIS TRIPLETT WITH BRUCE ROBINSON

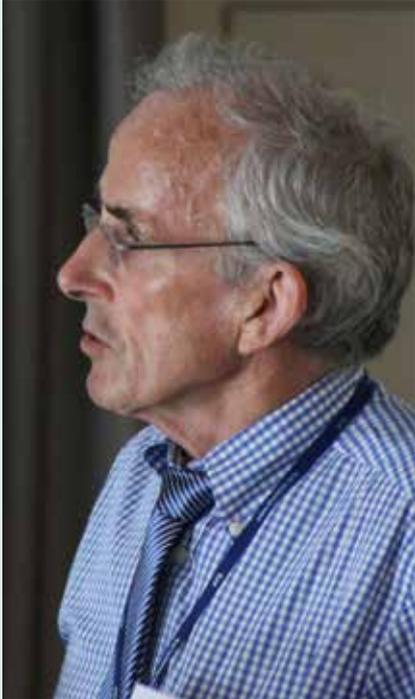
Festschrift for Bill Musk

Although the general opinion seems to be that "Bill will never retire", a Festschrift for Professor Bill Musk was held on Friday 15 November in the Mary Lockett Theatre at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. The afternoon was an opportunity for colleagues, co-researchers, and many others who have been mentored by or worked alongside Bill to reminisce about their experiences and share funny and very poignant anecdotes, as well as celebrating his extraordinarily productive career.

Bill is amongst just a handful of doctors in the world to have treated thousands of mesothelioma patients. And, as Gary Lee emphasised, he insisted that he, and others, take every opportunity to research. He has published more than 300 papers.

Bruce Robinson credits Bill for encouraging him to apply the research skills in immunology that he had brought back from the US in the mid-1980s to the mesothelioma epidemic in Western Australia. And the rest, as they say, is history.

A Festschrift is a collection of writings from an academic's close colleagues, often including his or her former doctoral students. It is typically published on the occasion of the honoree's retirement, sixtieth or sixty-fifth birthday, or other notable career anniversary.



BILL MUSK

NATIONAL ASBESTOS FORUM

A second National Asbestos Forum was held at the Sydney Hilton on 25 November 2013, during National Asbestos Awareness Week, co-hosted by the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency and Comcare.

Asbestos issues have stayed in the news in Australia this year; notably for workplace safety and environmental contamination issues connected with loose asbestos found in Telstra pits during the rollout of the National Broadband Network. Most recently there has been the discovery of white asbestos throughout parts on Chinese locomotives imported to Australia, despite the 10 year ban on asbestos imports to this country.

NCARD was represented at the Forum by Dr Matthew Tilbrook, and by Dr Joost Lesterhuis, who has recently returned to NCARD and Perth from the Netherlands, to settle in Australia with his wife and family. Joost's energy and fresh perspectives are already making a significant impact on the research team.



A panel discussion convened by renowned ABC journalist Matt Peacock consisted of Dr Joost Lesterhuis, Dr Mia Lindgren, now Head of the School of Journalism, Australian and Indigenous Studies at Monash University (and previously, at Murdoch University, the Chief Investigator on the Australian Asbestos Network project); Professor Nico van Zandwijk, Director of Sydney's Asbestos Disease Research Institute; and Professor Bill Musk.

A lively and informative discussion included Nico van Zandwijk describing home renovations in Australia as a "national sport", and Joost Lesterhuis noting that mesothelioma as a good candidate for immunotherapy, which has been successful in treating some cases of metastatic melanoma and lung cancer.

Charitable Partnership with Housing Industry Association

NCARD is the selected beneficiary of the Housing Industry Association Charitable Foundation for 2013. The Foundation identifies that "one of its important goals is to fund research concerning the health and wellbeing of those involved in the Australian residential building industry through grant opportunities to best practice research organisations". A version of the NCARD film was especially tailored for the Housing Industry Association's website: www.hia.com.au/foundation

We are optimistic about the potential for this partnership, and very grateful to the HIA Charitable Foundation for their support.

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RECENT GRANTS AND PUBLICATIONS

NHMRC Project Grants

Richard Lake, W Joost Lesterhuis, Andrea Kong, Anna Nowak, Bruce Robinson
Cancer chemo-immunotherapy: exploiting the immunogenic momentum of cytotoxic chemotherapy.
\$886,226
2014-2016
3 years

Jenette Creaney, Steve Skates, Bruce Robinson, Anna Nowak, Arthur W Musk
Can biomarkers improve outcomes for the asbestos-induced cancer malignant mesothelioma?
\$769,086
2014-2016
3 years

WA Department of Health

Bruce Robinson
Mesothelioma Pre-clinical and Clinical Trial Work
\$200,000
2014
1 year

RECENT NCARD PUBLICATIONS HAVE INCLUDED:

Cadby G, Mukherjee S, Musk AW, Robinson BWS et al. A genome-wide association study for malignant mesothelioma risk. *Lung Cancer*. 2013 Oct;82(1):1-8.

Creaney J, Sneddon S, Dick IM, Dare H, Boudville N, Musk AW, Skates S, Robinson BWS. Comparison of the diagnostic accuracy of the MSLN gene products, mesothelin and megakaryocyte potentiating factor as biomarkers for mesothelioma in pleural effusions and serum. *Disease Markers* Vol. 35, Article ID 874212, 2013.

Creaney J, Dick IM, Segal A, Musk AW and Robinson BWS. Pleural effusion hyaluronic acid as a prognostic marker in pleural malignant mesothelioma. *Lung Cancer*, published online 24 October 2013.

Khong A, Brown MD, Vivian JB, Robinson BWS, Currie AJ. Agonistic anti-CD40 antibody therapy is effective against postoperative cancer recurrence and metastasis in a murine tumor model. *Journal of Immunotherapy*, 36 (7) 365-72, Sep 2013.

Nowak AK, Brown C, Millward MJ, Creaney J, Byrne MJ, Hughes B, Kremmidiotis G, Bibby DC, Leske AF, Mitchell PL, Pavlakis N, Boyer M, Stockler MR. A phase II clinical trial of the vascular disrupting agent BNC105P as second line chemotherapy for advanced Malignant Pleural Mesothelioma. *Lung Cancer*. 2013 Sep;81(3):422-7.