

## EDSPACE

At the Discipline of General Practice, one of our goals is to improve the research capacity of primary health care workers. In this edition of the newsletter we have included a new approach to achieving this goal. A research profile is presented for (no.) local PHC worker/s. The primary focus of the profile is their research interests and research experience. It is hoped that these summaries will stimulate communication between HEARNet members (contact details also provided) and lead to a positive 'research relationship'. If you would like to be 'profiled' in the future, please let us know.

Our quantitative and qualitative columns present only snippets of information on the two research approaches. However, these columns are not only for the interest of experienced researchers. People who have little or no research experience are encouraged to explore some of the topics. If you have increased your research involvement since joining HEARNet you may like to mull over past columns for inspiration. If you have any queries or would like more information on a particular topic, feel free to contact us. I would also encourage you to contribute to future newsletters by providing information about your involvement with a research project.

Dr Terry Joyce  
Editor.

### Newcastle PHCRED Staff Profile

Inside this issue:	
Edspace	1
New members	2
Qual & Quan Columns	3
Tamworth PHCRED	4
News & Events	5



Debbie Mutton has worked at the Discipline of General Practice for 6 years. She has extensive Administrative experience both at the University and other businesses. Her current position is the PHCRED Administration Assistant for the Discipline research staff.

In addition to her administrative role, Debbie is responsible for maintaining the HEARNet membership database and she is involved in producing and distributing our HEARNet newsletter. Her role also includes assisting staff who conduct regular education

sessions for HEARNet members. Her responsibilities in this area include collating workshop handbooks and ensuring appropriate equipment is available (and working!). Debbie also assists with the financial accounts for a number of research projects and is our 'in house' travel agent, conference planner and for some of us, a personal IT problem solver.

Debbie is experienced in, and enjoys graphic design. This is often evident when she adds her 'flair' to conference posters, presentations and brochures.

## New Member Profiles

Joel Parker is a Research Radiation Therapist at the Dept. of Radiation Oncology, Calvary Mater Hospital who has extensive clinical experience with adult and paediatric oncology patients in Perth, Sydney and Newcastle. Image Guided Radiotherapy, Stereotactic Radiosurgery, and QoL Paediatric Radiotherapy are his areas of clinical interest. He also has a general interest in: radiobiology, wound management and fatigue. Joel's research experience includes 2 conference poster presentations - 'Paediatric RT - How do we get them through it?' and 'Novel fiducial box setup for stereotactic radiosurgery.' His research interests include: the use of PET/MRI imaging for accurate target delineation,

adaptive radiotherapy strategies, quality improvement and depression and malnutrition in Head + Neck patients. Joel is seeking opportunities to be involved in clinical research and may be contacted at; Ph. 02 49 211814. Email: [RT.Research@mater.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:RT.Research@mater.health.nsw.gov.au)



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Alison de Jager is employed as a Permanent reliever Speech Pathologist at Armidale, HNEAH. Since February 2005 Alison has worked in both the public and private health sector as a speech pathologist. Her current primary health care clinical interests are Paediatric Speech Pathology and

a general primary health care interest in School age language literacy. Consequently Alison may be interested in clinical research, population research and service evaluation on these topics. Alison contact details are: Ph. 0428 543 263. Email: [alison.dejager@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au](mailto:alison.dejager@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au)

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### **Research Tip**

'google' provides masses of reliable (and some not so reliable) information on research methodology and method.

## Qualitative Column

### Rigour in Qualitative Research (Part 1)

The importance of performing qualitative research with rigour cannot be overstated. Qualitative methods is sometimes criticised because it is seen as too subjective. This is often because the critics are ill-informed.

We must appreciate the origins of qualitative methods. Grounded theory was pioneered by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss from the Chicago School of Sociology. It was applied in symbolic interactionism, which Strauss explained as follows: 'Interactions can take place between individuals, but the individuals also represent - sociologically speaking - different and often multiple collectivities ... Thus, social structure and interaction are intimately linked.'

Strauss wrote extensively about social worlds theory. He defined social worlds as 'a set of common or joint activities or concerns, bound together by a network of communication.' Thus, social worlds are defined by interactions between individuals and vary according to a range of characteristics, such as types of activities, memberships, technology, ideology, geography and so forth. According to Strauss, there is an endless array of social worlds that coexist, intersect, collide and subdivide, often forming new social worlds or subworlds. It is a highly complex network of individual interactions that are both influenced by and serve to define social worlds.

The task confronting the qualitative researcher is to explore, describe, understand and ultimately explain social worlds by examining interactions between individuals. This is a challenging task and should not be taken lightly.

In subsequent columns in this newsletter we will look at mechanisms for ensuring a rigorous methodology.

## Quantitative Column

RCT-when only the best will do!  
Randomised Control trials (RCTs) are generally considered to provide the best quality evidence of causation. Participants are randomly allocated to either an intervention or control group. In this way if the sample is large enough, it is likely that any potential confounders (known and, more importantly, unknown) will be evenly distributed between the two groups. Thus, if a difference occurs, it is likely to be due to the intervention of interest.

The advantages of RCTs are:

- Intervention and control groups are likely to be very similar, especially if the groups are large.
- They provide the strongest evidence of cause and effect.
- They allow standardisation of eligibility criteria, treatment and outcomes.
- The statistical methods used to analyse them are largely devoid of inbuilt assumptions.

The disadvantages of RCTs are:

- Quality always costs more. RCTs are more expensive than other research designs in terms of time, money and people.
- The ethics application may be a nightmare - especially with unknown treatments where the potential for harm is not fully understood or the study population is considered more vulnerable to coercion.
- They are unsuitable if the outcome is rare or if you suspect your recruitment rate will be low (e.g. notoriously low response rates in GPs!)
- The study population does not always reflect the reference population and this reduces external validity. This can be due to volunteer/selection bias or the use of strict inclusion/exclusion criteria (which simultaneously increase internal validity and reduce external validity). External validity is also compromised by the use of highly standardise interventions which don't reflect common practice.



**University Department of Rural Health  
& Rural Clinical School**  
Northern New South Wales

## Tamworth PHCRED

### Researcher Development Program

Since the last newsletter our four RDP Fellows attended the NSW Short Course in Research Methods and Project Development Retreat. Feedback was positive with our researchers taking the opportunity to discuss their research projects with workshop mentors and to refine their research question and methodology.

### GP&PHC Conference

We are very excited to report that all four RDP Fellows have had an abstract accepted for poster presentations at the GP & PHC Conference to be held in Melbourne in July this year. This will be the first opportunity to present their projects in a public forum.

In addition, Dr Jenny May will be giving an oral presentation on "Occupational Violence - a study of the General Practice Team."

### Writers Group & Journal Club

These two monthly groups continue to attract clinicians and academics from a range of health disciplines. Over the last few years the Writers Group has provided a peer review forum for both experienced and novice authors, resulting in a number of publications and the Journal Club is all about improving critical appraisal skills by discussing published articles.

Deputy Director UDRH  
A/Prof Tony Smith

## Introducing Tamworth 2009 RDP Fellows

**Judy Coates** is a Registered Physiotherapist working for Hunter New England Area Health Transitional Aged Care Program (TACP), Pulmonary Rehabilitation, and outpatient physiotherapy for Manilla Health Service. She has a strong interest in developing and implementing preventative strategies for health issues aimed at "wellness". Judy's role has a strong focus on falls prevention in the elderly and she is a member of the local HNEAHS working party for falls prevention in the community.



During her time working in TACP Judy became aware that while the program has provided services to more than 200 clients none have been of Aboriginal background. Judy was prompted to search for more information that may provide insight into the falls risk for Indigenous elderly populations; to determine whether there is a problem with falls risk in this population group; what is associated with the risk and, when that falls risk may occur. The long-term goal from this and possible on-going research is to develop a suitable falls

prevention service specific to the elderly Indigenous population group.

**Sally Moy** is an experienced Dietitian who has worked in a number of rural settings. During the past 12 months Sally has been based at Tamworth Rural Referral Hospital and has developed a keen interest in the treatment of patients with eating disorders.

Sally is undertaking a literature review to determine if there are any best practice models of care for treating eating disorder patients in rural areas. The aim of this research is to determine the health outcomes of eating disorder patients (such as those with anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, EDNOS or binge eating disorder) who have received dietetic treatment at Tamworth Rural Referral Hospital. The research will involve a retrospective review of medical records over the past five years to determine health outcomes compared to the best practice goals, as identified in the literature. Data collected will include: age of patients, length of treatment, referral source, presentations to hospital



(cont' pg 5)

**Contact Us****Newsletter of the Health Evaluation Research Network**

Debbie Mutton  
HEARNet Coordinator  
Discipline of General Practice  
University of Newcastle  
CALLAGHAN NSW 2308

Phone: 02 4968 6724  
Fax: 02 4968 9065  
Email: [health-phcnetwork@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:health-phcnetwork@newcastle.edu.au)

**State Events**

NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health (NSW CAAH)

**Youth Health Forum: Research & Practice Innovation - 7 Sep 2009, Westmead**

The Youth Health Forum Organising Committee, in conjunction with the Family and Community Health Research Group, University of Western Sydney, will be hosting this one-day forum looking at youth health research and the use of evidence to improve youth health care.

**3rd Rural Health Research Colloquium (RHRC)**

27-29 October 2009  
Ballina RSL Club, Ballina, NSW  
<http://www.rhrc2009.com>

**National Events****GP & PHC Research Conference**

15-17 July  
'Driving Change in:.....'  
Melbourne Conference Centre  
<http://www.phcris.org.au/conference/2009/index.php>

**GP'09 -The Conference for General Practice (RACGP)**

1-4 October 2009  
Burswood Entertainment Complex, Perth  
<http://www.gpconference.com.au/>

**2009 Journal Club Meetings**

<b>Venue:</b>	Meeting Room, Disc General Practice, Newbolds Building, Gavey St, Mayfield
<b>Time:</b>	Thursday 9.30 - 10.30am
<b>Meeting Dates:</b>	28 May, 4 Jun, 2 Jul, 6 Aug, 10 Sep, 8 Oct, 5 Nov, 3 Dec

**2009 HEARNet Workshops**

<b>Venue:</b>	Meeting Room, Disc General Practice, Newbolds Building, Gavey St, Mayfield
<b>Time:</b>	Thursdays 10.00 - 12 midday
<b>11 Jun</b>	Questionnaire Design
<b>23 Jul</b>	Ethics
<b>13 Aug</b>	Research Proposals
<b>3 Sep</b>	Qualitative Data Collection
<b>15 Oct</b>	Qualitative Data Analysis
<b>19 Nov</b>	Writing up Results

(cont' from pg4)

and consultations with other health professionals. Outcome measures may include: weight, BMI and other health measures.

From this research Sally hopes to find out if patients treated by the dietetics department at Tamworth Rural Referral Hospital for an eating disorder have positive health outcomes consistent with best practice. It is hypothesised that patients who are involved in a multi-disciplinary approach to treatment will have more positive health outcomes.