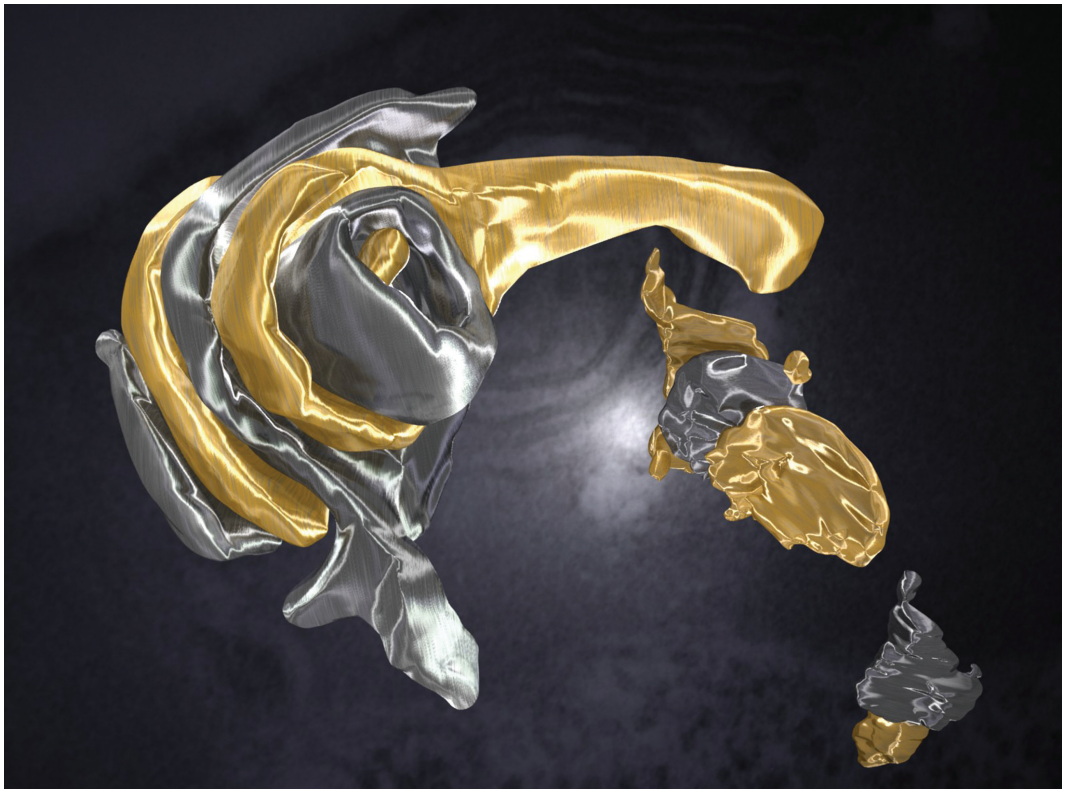
In brief



NHMRC/Eric Hanssen, The University of Melbourne

Is it molten metal? Or some discarded Christmas wrapping? No, it's a three-dimensional segmentation model of the stack Maurer's cleft from the parasite Plasmodium falciparum, *which causes malaria. The Maurer's cleft is responsible for exporting the principal virulence factor from the parasite. The image, developed from an electron tomogram of a whole* P. falciparum *parasite, won the National Health and Medical Research Council's recent Science to Art Award. The image was created by Eric Hanssen, Manager of the Electron Microscopy Unit at the Bio21 Institute, University of Melbourne.*

From the NHMRC

Building funding schemes to support research translation

Over 75 years, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has been proud of the diversity and flexibility of its funding schemes for research. In 2011, our funding schemes were aimed at creating knowledge (including in targeted areas of need), building Australia's research capacity in all four pillars (health services, public health, clinical research and biomedical research), and supporting the translation of knowledge into better health care, better prevention, and new industries and products to build national wealth.

Some of our most important funding streams encourage clinicians to bring their experience into the research context. A good example of this is our Practitioner Fellowships Scheme, under which 18 new Fellowships were announced in 2011 ($7.9 million). These Fellowships support active clinicians providing patient care in undertaking research linked to their practice or policy.

NHMRC Early Career and Career Development Fellowships now have separate streams for clinical researchers and for public health and health services researchers. In 2010, the NHMRC introduced the new Translating Research into Practice Fellowships to support future leaders in translating research findings into practice.

In addition to supporting individuals in translation activities, the NHMRC Partnerships for Better Health Projects scheme aims to encourage research projects that focus on collaborative partnerships with organisations (eg, state and territory health departments) that have a key interest in translating research into policy and practice in public health, health services and clinical practice. On 17 October 2011, 13 new Partnerships for Better Health Project Grants (worth over $9.8 million) were announced.

Early in 2012, we will be announcing the intended development of up to six new Partnership Centres. These will be cofunded by the NHMRC and other public and private organisations, where we have common goals to better address translation gaps in important areas of health policy and practice.

NHMRC Development Grants, including those announced by Minister for Health Tanya Plibersek on 15 December 2011, are a well established funding vehicle, in existence for more than a decade, for linking researchers with industry partners to support early translation of biomedical research. We are currently investigating the outcomes of this scheme.

As we open the NHMRC's next funding rounds, we invite investigators working in clinical practice and policy environments to consider these key elements in Australia's health and medical research system.

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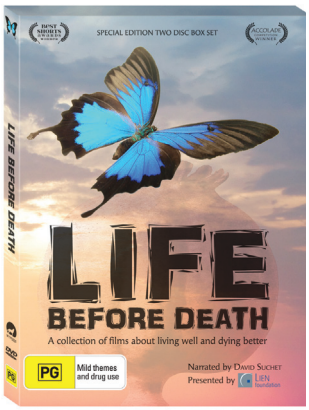
News

LIFE before death documentary series



An award-winning documentary series focusing on pain management and palliative care around the world will be released in February. The *LIFE before death* series, which was filmed in 11 countries, aims to raise awareness of the factors contributing to high levels of untreated pain, and the practice of palliative care worldwide. According to the film, 80% of people globally lack adequate access to essential pain medicines. The feature film includes interviews with dozens of leading health professionals, including Australia's Professor Michael Cousins, Professor David Hill and Dr Jim Cleary. The film will be screened by the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne on 6 February and by Palliative Care Australia on 8 February at Parliament House, Canberra. The project also includes 50 short films, one of which is being released each week at www.youtube.com/lifebeforedeathmovie. Doctors or organisations that are interested in hosting a screening, perhaps in conjunction with World Cancer Day on 4 February, can see www.lifebeforedeath.com/movie for more information.

More benefits for statins

People who have boldly suggested that statins should be added to the water supply may appreciate new research which finds that the cholesterol-lowering drugs may also reduce mortality in patients with influenza. The observational study used data from United States patients hospitalised with influenza during the 2007–2008 influenza season. One-third of the 3043 patients had used statins before or during hospitalisation. After adjusting for various factors (including age, lung disease and initiation of antiviral therapy), the patients not receiving the statins were almost twice as likely to die from influenza as those who did take the drugs. The researchers said there was a need for randomised controlled trials before statins could be widely promoted for influenza treatment; however, they said that statins might provide a useful adjunct to antiviral medications and vaccine.

J Infect Dis 2012; 205: 13-19

Delaying motherhood

Australian women are waiting longer than ever to have children, according to a new report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The average age of women giving birth has increased steadily in recent years, from 29.0 years in 2000 to 30.0 in 2009. Almost one-quarter (22.8%) of women giving birth in 2009 were aged 35 or over, up from 17.1% in 2000. The proportion of first-time mothers aged 35 or over also increased — from 10.3% in 2000 to 13.7% in 2009. Home births remained extremely uncommon, comprising only 0.3% of women who gave birth in 2009. Smoking was still relatively common, with 14.5% of all mothers, 37.0% of teenage mothers and 49.6% of Indigenous mothers reporting that they smoked during their pregnancy.

Australia's mothers and babies 2009; AIHW Cat. No. PER 52 (Released 21 Dec 2011)

Salt experts eat too much salt

In a case of "do as I say, not as I do", new research has found that salt policymakers eat too much salt at work. Researchers in the Netherlands assessed the salt content of hot meals served at canteens where salt policymakers work, such as the Department of Health and university hospitals. They found that the average salt content of the hot meals was 7.1 g — higher than the total recommended daily salt intake of 6 g. Using data from a national survey on food consumption, they estimated that the total daily salt intake among people who ate these meals was 15.4 g. "Consuming these high salt meals translates into a 23-36% increase in premature cardiovascular mortality", the researchers wrote.

BMJ 2011; 20 December (online)

From the MJA archives

MJA 1959; 10 January (edited extract)

Current comment: Carcinoma of the lung

It is no longer news that cancer of the lung is alarmingly common and that each year more and more cases are being reported in most countries where adequate statistics are kept.

Richard Doll, writing on "The Smoking of Tobacco", concludes that cigarette smoking is one of the causes of lung cancer. He bases his belief on the following points: i) the histological changes that frequently precede the development of cancer are also related to smoking ii) there are several carcinogenic substances in tobacco smoke iii) extracts of tobacco tar are capable of causing skin cancer in animals. Doll adds that not all investigators accept his conclusions.

KFW Hinson writes that squamous carcinoma seems to be the least malignant type and is the one most often found in heavy smokers. Adenocarcinomata do not seem to be associated with smoking, are more common in women than squamous growths, and are usually sited peripherally.

Sophie McNamara

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