



Reuters

New research commissioned by Oxfam suggests that extreme weather could lead to extreme rises in the price of food staples around the world, with "severe consequences for the precarious lives and livelihoods of people in poverty", such as this fruit vendor near the Pakistani capital of Islamabad.

From the NHMRC

NHMRC Research Translation Faculty

The new Research Translation Faculty of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is now underway. This is a major strategic initiative for health and medical research translation in Australia.

The creation of knowledge through research underpins improvements in Australia's health, but there is a gap between discovery and the implementation of knowledge from research, which slows the uptake of the benefits of research for patients and for the operation of the health system.¹

Australian researchers supported by the NHMRC are a major resource for research translation in Australia, but they have not been enabled to play this role fully in recent times. NHMRC-funded researchers create the new knowledge; they are aware of the international peer-reviewed literature and have international jobs, roles and contacts. Many are also in

positions where they can directly influence practice and policy and the training of future practitioners and policymakers.

It is for this reason that the NHMRC is inviting its chief investigators and fellowship holders to join the Research Translation Faculty, to help meet the challenge of research translation in Australia. As a key advisory forum, the Faculty will initially focus on two specific activities:

- identifying the most significant gaps between research evidence and health policy and practice in each of the health areas to be identified in the NHMRC's forthcoming strategic plan for 2013–15, and recommending to the NHMRC the action needed to address those gaps; and
- identifying and putting forward a case for a significant, potentially



Warwick P Anderson
Chief Executive Officer

Jodie L Clydesdale
Senior Project Officer,
Research Translation
Group

National Health and
Medical Research Council

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transformational, targeted call for research in these areas for consideration through the NHMRC's principal committees and council, and independent input from community and consumer advocates.

Invitations have been sent to all eligible researchers, and the Faculty will be formally launched at a symposium in October.

The NHMRC consulted with national and international experts in developing this leading initiative, which will see our first-class researchers directly assist the central health and research authority in identifying and recommending remedies to the gap between discovery and implementation.

¹ Butler D. Translational research: crossing the valley of death. *Nature* 2008; 453: 840–842. <http://www.nature.com/news/2008/080611/full/453840a.html> (accessed Aug 2012).

News

Drug provides relief for stubborn chronic cough

Gabapentin, a drug widely used to treat epilepsy and neuropathic pain, is an effective and well tolerated treatment for chronic cough, a small Australian randomised study has found. The study involved 62 patients recruited from John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle, NSW, who had cough lasting longer than 8 weeks and who had not responded to standard treatment, including inhaled asthma medications, antibiotics, nasal corticosteroids and antihistamines.

Reporting in *The Lancet*, the researchers found that gabapentin significantly improved cough-specific quality of life compared with placebo. The positive effects suggested that central sensitisation was a relevant mechanism in refractory chronic cough, they wrote. The study also found that side effects occurred in 10 (31%) of the patients given gabapentin, with the most common being nausea and fatigue.

The researchers said gabapentin could be considered a viable alternative to current cough treatment, especially for refractory chronic cough. An editorial in the same issue said the findings provided hope for people with chronic cough, which although not life-threatening, is both psychologically and physically disabling, and is becoming an increasing clinical problem.

Lancet 2012; 28 August (online)



One-quarter of preschoolers have social-emotional problems

As Australia prepares to screen preschoolers for early signs of mental illness, a United States study has found that one-quarter of low-income preschool-aged children screened positive for social-emotional problems. The study, a survey of 254 parents of children aged 3–4 years at two urban primary care clinics in Ohio, found most parents were agreeable to a referral to a behavioural health service or a recommendation that they enrol their child in preschool. The authors said their findings suggested that social-emotional problems in this age group were underidentified, because only 16% of children who screened positive had been referred to relevant services.

Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med 2012; 27 August (online)

Time to rethink TB vaccination

Widespread use of the bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine for tuberculosis (TB) over nine decades has failed to reduce the global TB burden, according to a review article published in *Trends in Molecular Medicine*. The authors said the BCG vaccine had proven inadequate in preventing pulmonary TB, and its efficacy was poorest in TB-endemic areas because previous exposure to helminths and non-TB-causing mycobacteria interfered with a protective immune response from BCG vaccination. "Radical approaches are therefore warranted in the development of a vaccination strategy that could be applied globally", said the authors, who included Professor David Jackson, from the University of Melbourne. "Recent studies indicate that, owing to several unique properties, lipidated peptide based vaccines hold significant promise as a successful future vaccine candidate against TB."

Trends Mol Med 2012; 28 August (online)

From the MJA archives

MJA 1966; 17 September (edited extract)

A facelift clamp

One of the very few complications of facelifting (apart from psychological ones) is swelling over the parotid region caused by blood and/or serum. In the past I have used a tight elastic pressure bandage, but there is no way of using this bandage to squeeze effectively the parotid area.

Landing at Mexico City a few months ago, I noticed that the Qantas ground engineers wore ear muffs to deaden the whine of the Boeing 707. I bought a pair of these ear muffs and replaced the rubber ear pieces with a circle of plywood covered with plastic foam and a washable plastic cover.

At the end of the operation and after the wounds have been dressed and held in place by a stockinette bandage, this clamp is adjusted to



the parotid areas and held in place by safety pins to the stockinette bandage. The clamp is removed in 24 hours. Since the introduction of the clamp, I have performed 24 operations, and not one has resulted in the slightest degree of swelling or haematoma.

By Dr Graham Humby

Raft of factors behind fall in STEMI deaths

Early mortality after ST-elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI) dropped by more than two-thirds between 1995 and 2010, in line with improvements in care and a substantial change in patient risk, French researchers have found. Their study aimed to identify the factors — beyond reperfusion therapy — that had improved survival in patients with STEMI over the 15-year period. They found that the crude 30-day mortality decreased from 13.7% to 4.4%, with the reduction explained not only by improved care, such as greater use of reperfusion therapy and early use of recommended medications, but also by changes in the patient profile and changes in behaviour, such as faster calls for medical help.

JAMA 2012; 27 August (online)

Marge Overs

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