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Awards for Excellence

CMVH staff were recognised for excellence in research and quality of research presentations at the joint Australian Military Medicine Association and Defence Health Services conference held in Brisbane in October 2006.

LTCOL Peter Nasveld was a co-author with researchers from the Australian Malaria Institute and a co-recipient of the prestigious Weary Dunlop Award for a presentation describing ongoing development of an improved vaccine for Japanese encephalitis. The purpose of this research is to protect troops who may be deployed at short notice

into regions where the disease is endemic. LTCOL Scott Kitchener was a co-recipient of the Surgeon General's Patron's Prize for the publication judged the best by a member in the previous year. Scott's co-authors were also from the Australian Malaria Institute at Enoggera for a paper which described tolerability of the anti-malarial mefloquine in Australian troops. A new award was presented on behalf of The College of Nursing by Prof Judy Lumby to CAPT Tracy Carthew. Tracy was co-author on a presentation which described leadership and management support for ADF Nursing Officers.

Recruiting Standards

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) recognises that it is competing for personnel in a labour market characterised by a shrinking supply of competent workers and a growing number of employers. Besides holding all necessary educational and experiential qualifications, candidates for enlistment into the ADF must satisfy demanding health and fitness criteria. However, the ADF must constantly review these criteria against the changing Australian workforce, to ensure that it does not exclude otherwise suitable candidates through application of unduly restrictive health standards.

CMVH have been recruited to critically review a number of medical recruitment standards, including asthma and colour vision. Defence Force Recruiting medically screens all applicants and those with asthma are classified unfit for enlistment. As the incidence of asthma has increased and the treatment of asthma has evolved in recent years, the ADF is investigating the relevance of these standards and potential impact of any changes. This would include monitoring of asthmatics enlisted in the ADF.

Colour vision of enlistment applicants is assessed and those who have a colour vision deficiency undergo further testing and are classified accordingly. The first component of this study involves a risk assessment of the electrical and mechanical trades and associated training to identify colour critical tasks and the second is an assessment of alternative colour vision tests which may allow greater discrimination than in service tests in current use. CMVH are due to present final reports to Defence Force Recruiting by the end of March.

CMDR **Sonya Bennett** was a founding member of CMVH in January 2004. Sonya held the position of Research Manager through this period and guided the research pillar from start up and staff of one through a period of dramatic growth to a group of 10 full time and 4 part time employees. The Deployment Health Surveillance Program was initiated during this period to detect emerging veterans' health issues and generate data for investigation of identified health issues.

Sonya developed research links and collaborations with other institutions and provided leadership for definition and development of a series of research projects.

CMVH Staff (see photo on left) farewell Sonya and wish her well for 2007.



e-Health News

The e-Health Pillar has recently been going through a period of 'rationalisation'. LCDR Bob Curtis is now the Pillar Head, as Mr Phil Johnson has been 'elevated' to a University of Queensland Faculty level e-health business and opportunities development role, responsible to the Executive Dean, Professor Brookes. LCDR John Ashley's position is returning to Canberra in late March. John will be a part of the new Directorate of Health Workforce Development. CPL Anthony Hopcraft remains the stalwart of the team.

e-Health's priorities for the next period will be the establishment of an inter-Agency e-Health Newsletter targeted at topics that will provide discussion and build interest in development or deployment of e-Health systems in the ADF or for veterans. We will also be reforming and reinvigorating the stakeholder Strategic e-Health Research Committee. LCDR Curtis is also providing e-Health expertise to a DCOH project on an exposure database and to a University of Queensland project with Queensland Health on automated data mining to reduce adverse outcomes. e-Health is also collaborating with DSTO on development of an article on medical simulation and use of virtual reality technology.

A number of liaison meetings have been held with Prof Brian Corbitt of RMIT, staff from IBM Healthcare, EDS Defence Systems Australia and the Health Informatics Society of Australia. e-Health attended the company launch of EDS Defence Systems Australia in Canberra also attended by Ministers Nelson and Bilson. EDS International has an extensive maintenance contract with the US DVA to sustain their national electronic health record system, VistA. On the distant horizon, our staff are looking forward to 'MEDinfo' the 12th World Congress on Health Informatics, to be held in Brisbane in August.



Director's message

When I reflect on 2006, there are many significant milestones that have been achieved by the dedicated team working for CMVH. Just a few of these are:

- Completion of two think tank exercises. The first of these considered military health ethics and was held in Brisbane. The second covered broad aspects of aero medical evacuation and was conducted in Adelaide.
- Completion of a research study considering the exposure of submariners to hazards on the Oberon Class submarine. This provided a basis for compensation claims to be considered by the Department of Veterans' Affairs.
- The numbers of Defence students enrolled in courses is steadily increasing and new course initiatives are being established.
- e-Health was tasked by AVM Tony Austin and are working on initiatives related to Health Keys and deployable health and building wider collaborations (e.g. with NEHTA).
- A successful Health Aspects of Disaster Management course was completed at Herston. CMVH personnel, in particular through A/Prof David Cooper in Menzies School of Health (Darwin node of CMVH), have specialist expertise in this field.

The new strategic plan for Jan 2007 – June 2008 has been drafted with extended collaboration with the Centres of Excellence and DSTO.

Looking forward our priorities for 2007 will be:

- Demonstrate the value of CMVH to veterans and serving personnel in all activities.
- Develop a Living Well Program with a focus on the research and development of interventions to promote wellness, and early intervention/rehabilitation for health problems, especially after leaving Defence, and post-deployment.
- Support the Health Workforce Development Unit in Defence to improve



recruitment and retention of health personnel through best practice innovative learning programs.

- Develop CMVH Darwin Mode and strengthen the management of CMVH between the three universities, thus realizing maximum potential between the consortia partners.
- Enhance academic credibility by increasing publications and broadening the CMVH funding base

This will be an exciting 12 months to further build and leap forward based on our achievements of last year.

Military Health Ethics

The “Towards a Framework for Military Health Ethics Think Tank” was conducted at Customs House on the 16-18th October with twenty-six invited participants. The three services of Defence were represented in command and health sectors; the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, academic institutions, ex-service organisations and non-government organisations (NGO) also participated in the activity. There were also two international participants, MAJGEN Mike Von Bertele, RAMC representing the UK Ministry of Defence and Prof Moni McIntyre, an ethicist and Naval reservist from the United States. One of the key objectives of the Think Tank was to identify and address current ethical decision making frameworks or systems used by health and operational personnel when confronted with ethical challenges.

A series of presentations considered how Military Ethics was viewed within Defence. Differing views of current perspectives of Military Ethics in the ADF were provided by senior Tri-Service commanders and health personnel, CDRE Trevor Jones, Director General, Navy Capability Performance and Plans; BRIG Gerard Fogerty representing the Defence Personnel Executive; AVM Tony Austin, Head, Defence Health Services; and RADM Graeme Shirtley, ADF Surgeon General. These presentations addressed such issues as the importance of where health and health ethics fits in the broader military ethics position, what ethical decision making frameworks are currently being used and the general effectiveness of current ethical training /education practices. Both supporting and alternate perspectives were provided by Mr Greg Heesom, a senior representative of Red Cross and Mr Jamie Cullens representing the Australian Defence College.

During the activity a requirement for a Code of Conduct was identified with a discussion based around which issues and material should be addressed and included in such a document. Potential implementation of a Code of Conduct was summarised in a set of issues and principles. One key issue discussed was establishing and maintaining a balance between professional health obligations and the chain of command within the broader operational context. A second was consistently maintaining an ethical conversation or dialogue by creating and maintaining an appropriate forum within Defence. An issue that was considered important by Think Tank

participants was the need for health professionals to be acutely aware of the limits of their competence. Individuals would need to ensure they operated within these limits at all times especially within the context of ADF operations.

The Think Tank endorsed a need for change to ensure the ADF is not confronted by actions that could leave them ethically compromised both domestically and internationally. It was agreed



that this “change” was to be a reaffirmation of the ADF’s focus on values. The CMVH Military Health Ethics Report provides final recommendations and implementation strategies from the Think Tank activity and these will be available on the CMVH website in March 07.

Professional Development Programs

2007 has seen the introduction of Captain Genevieve Liebich as the Professional Development Officer taking over from Major Nick Duff who has taken up a civilian position in the private health sector. Genevieve has come from the position of Senior Military Physiotherapist at Lavarack Barracks Medical Centre in Townsville and brings with her a broad range of knowledge in the military medical area.

The professional development pillar has started this year at a rapid pace with a large increase in the number of student enrolments from 11 to 27 students in the suite of Public Health (Defence) programs compared to the same semester last year. The introduction of the 16 unit Masters program has received a considerable amount of interest from health professionals, with Defence students

making up over a third of the class roll. We have also welcomed our first international student who has travelled from Oman to study full-time in the Master of Public Health (Defence) program. Dr Hasaan Al Qaartoobi is a naval Doctor in the Oman Defence Force.

The focus of the Professional Development Pillar this year will be continuing to develop and promote the variety of courses and programs run by our University consortium partners through the annual Road Show. The Road Show will be visiting all major Defence Health establishments in all States between March and June this year and initial visits have been conducted in Brisbane health units.

As a centre for excellence CMVH will strive through its PD Pillar to provide

opportunities to enhance learning and gain recognition for previous study.



Dr Hasaan Al Qaartoobi is welcomed to CMVH by Ms Margaret Cherry (left) and PDO, Captain Genevieve Liebich (right).

DHSP

The Deployment Health Surveillance Program (DHSP) is a series of studies critically reviewing post-deployment health of ADF personnel. The Solomon Islands Health Study is the first full-scale study to go into the field, with a mail-out due in early March.

Program Manager, Dr Christine McClintock, reports that invitation packs will be sent to 1000 randomly selected current and former ADF personnel. "Half of those invited to take part will have been deployed to the Solomons, with the other half being a comparison group who did not deploy" she explained. "The questionnaire asks about current health and deployment experiences, and may be completed by a choice of methods: pen and paper, online, telephone or face-to-face interview."

A priority is to increase awareness of the study among Defence personnel. Articles and advertisements about the Solomon Islands Study have been published in various Defence-related publications and DHSP plans to place posters at various Army, Navy and Air Force bases.

With such a busy schedule ahead, DHSP recently welcomed four new staff members: Michael Waller (Statistician), Dr Annabel McGuire (Research Fellow), Dr Brad McCall (Chief Investigator for Bougainville and East Timor Health Studies) and Colleen Loos (Senior Research Assistant).

Adelaide update

The MEAO Deployed Health Surveillance project has just commenced and is a longitudinal study involving MEAO veterans. The study will look at health effects of this deployment with a view to improving health surveillance methods and achieving earlier interventions where possible. There is also a cancer and mortality study which will show if deployment to the MEAO increases risk of these outcomes.

The Aeromedical Evacuation Workshop was held in conjunction with Emergency Management Australia and Department of Defence in Adelaide South Australia last November. Experts in mass casualty evacuation from the ADF, the Australian Government, commercial providers and International defence forces were brought together for the first time. Pictured are

SQNLDR Jude Telford (RNZAF), GPCAPT Tracy Smart (RAAF), WGCDR Andrew Pearce (RAH and RAAF SR) and Claude Daniel from Nova Defence. This workshop provided the opportunity for the different groups to form a network, compare their experiences, processes and equipment, explore case studies, identify key issues and develop recommendations to work toward an Australian national approach to AME for significant disasters.



Darwin update

Charles Darwin University (CDU) is continuing to build strong links between CMVH and CDU through the Menzies School of Health Research and the Graduate School for Health Practice, Faculty of Health Science and Education. This is based on mutual interests and shared work on heat stress, a health services research project currently short-listed by NHMRC for funding and a collaborative Public Health Education and Research Program project based on Disaster and Emergency that is about to begin. We look forward to more and increased opportunities for collaboration between the two organisations, particularly as we have such a strong military presence in the Northern Territory and a regional interest

in protecting Australia from epidemics of communicable diseases and preparing for disasters

Dr David Cooper from New South Wales has been appointed as the new Associate Professor in Disaster Preparedness and Response. This is a joint initiative between the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre at the Royal Darwin Hospital, and Charles Darwin University. Dr Cooper has been involved in national policy development and initiatives such as the Australian Mass Casualty Burn Disaster Plan and operationally with both Bali bombing incidents. Dr Cooper will be a key link between CDU and CMVH.

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