It is an honour and a privilege, says Professor Richard Larkins

VC handover will be smooth

**APPOINTMENT**

Monash University's current and incoming vice-chancellors, Professor Peter Dawrell and Professor Richard Larkins AO, will meet over the coming months to ensure a smooth transition of the university's leadership.

Monash announced last month that Professor Larkins would succeed Professor Dawrell as vice-chancellor. He will take up his appointment on 1 September this year.

Professor Dawrell, who will retire in September, said he looked forward to welcoming Professor Larkins to Monash.

"Professor Larkins and I share a commitment to the ongoing quality teaching and research at the university, and we are determined that Monash will not miss a beat during this handover period," Professor Dawrell said.

Looking forward: Professor Richard Larkins AO, left, and Professor Peter Dawrell.

"This is an extremely exciting time for the university, with the development of the National Stem Cell Centre, a $300 million Science Technology Research and Innovation Precinct and Australia's first synchrotron," Engineering and Innovation Council from 1997 to 2000. He was appointed an Officer in the General Division of the Order of Australia in 2002.

Monash chancellor Mr Jerry Ellis said Professor Larkins would continue the significant advances in research and academic management that Monash was making in its substantial operations in Victoria and around the globe.

"Monash has set a determined path to be one of the world's leading universities," Mr Ellis said. "With the appointment of an academic leader of the calibre of Professor Larkins, Monash can be assured that it will remain focused on innovation, internationalisation and engagement well into the future."

**CONTACT:** monashnews@adm.monash.edu.au

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**BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE**

Daily grind wears down koalas' sex lives

The older a male koala gets, the more time he spends feeding and the less time he has for social activities such as mating. Monash University researchers have found.

PhD researcher Mr Murray Logan, from the School of Biological Sciences, says this drop in amorous behaviour is a reflection on the state of male koala's teeth. Koala teeth wear down as a result of their grinding eucalyptus leaves - their primary source of food.

Koalas use a koala's teeth wear as an indicator of its age.

"We wanted to know, as the koala's teeth wore down, how their feeding was affected," Mr Logan said. "We looked at how long they spent feeding and whether they were more or less interested in each other."

In collaboration with Professor Gordon Simmons, head of Monash's School of Biological Sciences, Mr Logan found that the more worn a male koala's teeth were, the longer they needed to spend feeding each day.

The research has been published in the *Australian Journal of Zoology*.

"Koalas sleep or rest 20 hours a day. Those with more worn-down teeth have to spend twice as long feeding - twice for five hours rather than 2.5 hours - to extract enough energy from their food," Mr Logan said. "So there's not much time for them to do anything else if they're to get their rest as well."

Mr Logan studied six male koalas, all with the same weight and body condition, on Raymond Island off the Victorian coast. The only apparent difference between the animals was their degree of tooth wear. Two koalas had a low degree of tooth wear; two had a medium degree and two had a high degree of wear.

Mr Logan fitted radio collars with microphones to each koala, which allowed him to follow each animal as it moved from tree to tree, observing it from a distance and recording how much time it spent bellowing - one of the ways male koalas exert their social dominance and advertise their position to receptive females.

"The more bellowing a male does, the more dominant he is and the more likely he is to mate," Mr Logan said. "In that sense, their teeth defined their reproductive life span."

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**NEWS**

**NEWS FROM THE CAMPUSES OF MONASH UNIVERSITY**

**VOLUME 6 **

**NUMBER 2 APRIL 2003**
Ancient Greek, among students studying classical studies, including Latin and Ancient Greek, among students at Monash University. Films such as Gladiators and Lord of the Rings, television series including: 'Gladiator' and 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' and the Harry Potter books explore many of the themes present in ancient literature, according to assistant lecturer in classical studies at Monash Ms Annabel Orchard.

"At the moment, there is a global interest in classical studies, and I think that can be attributed largely to popular culture - to books, 'sword and sandal' films and television shows that have a mythological or fantasy base," Ms Orchard said. "Students are discovering that delving into cultures of Ancient Greece and Rome helps them understand the foundations of their own cultures and to find out what's changed in 3000 years - and what hasn't."

Ms Orchard said there was also a growing interest in the mythology of Australian aboriginals such as bushranger Ned Kelly and "For the love of Do Deen" in films as well as the ANZAC legend.

"Those areas of interest will also be bolstered by popular culture - for example the new Ned Kelly movie with Heath Ledger in the title role," she said.

- Allison Harding

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South African campus welcomes new students

Monash South Africa campus entered its third year by welcoming a group of about 200 new students.

Orientation 2003, held over four days in February, aimed to familiarise new students with the campus and give them the chance to meet staff and other students.

Students attended orientation sessions and took part in sports activities, such as well-being and basketball training.

A highlight was the Jambie drum workshop, which has become an Orientation tradition at the South Africa campus.

Premier launches centre for business management

Management education at Monash University received a boost when Victorian Premier Steve Bracks launched a new research and graduate centre at Caulfield campus recently.

The MBA (Master of Business Administration) and DBA (Doctor of Business Administration) Centre boasts an innovative study program that draws on diverse fields of study, including law, medicine, finance, IT and pharmacy.

Mr Bracks said the centre would enhance Victoria's status as a centre of excellence in management education and development. "The opening of the MBA and DBA Centre here at Monash is a major step in achieving this. It is also a major milestone for a university which boasts an MBA program that consistently ranks in the world's top 100," he said.

Business and Economics dean Professor Gill Palmer said the centre would become the hub of a new model of university-wide executive education that could provide both professional and technical development and high-level management skills.

"The establishment of the centre is an exciting new phase in the development of executive management research and education at Monash," she said. "In contrast to the traditional business school model, Monash MBA and DBA students will have the distinct advantage of being able to draw on the diversity, strengths and academic resources across the entire university.

"Monash has a distinguished history in management education, and its strength has been in expertise in the fundamentals of the world of business and commerce. We are now able to offer a learning-experience with expertise from a much broader field of studies."

Monash University and its Faculty of Business and Economics have invested more than $2 million in building developments for the new educational facility.

The MBA and DBA is a research degree equivalent to a PhD, specifically aimed at experienced managers who wish to enhance their knowledge and skills in applied research on a particular business issue.

A feature of the Monash MBA is its ability to offer specialisations and professional development courses in areas such as corporate finance, information technology, international business, pharmacy, health care, multimedia and law. Double masters degrees are also available with the MBA.

- Robyn Annis

Monash takes key role in school of government

Monash University is playing a pivotal role in a new national school of government that will offer high-level courses designed for the next generation of public sector leaders.

The Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) is an initiative of the governments of Australia, New Zealand, Victoria, NSW and Queensland, as well as 11 universities including Monash University.

The school, located in Parkville, Melbourne, will offer masters-level programs in public administration and specialised programs in policy and management in the public, government-related and not-for-profit sectors. Courses are due to begin in May this year.

Retiring chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and honorary professor in Monash Faculty of Business and Economics Professor Alan Finkel has been appointed as ANZSOG's director general.

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"The establishment of the centre is an exciting new phase in the development of executive management research and education at Monash," she said.

- Allison Harding

CONTACT: www.anzsg.edu.au

In brief

Monash student wins synchrotron fellowship

Monash PhD graduate Dr Karen Siu has been awarded a Monash University Research Fellowship, to be built at Monash, is expected to be operational in 2006. Dr Siu has been awarded a Monash University Research Fellowship, to be built at Monash, is expected to be operational in 2006.

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- Allison Harding

CONTACT: www.anzsg.edu.au

Monash News, April 2003
**Smart cars aim to cut accidents**

**TRANSPORT SYSTEMS**

The latest intelligence systems in drivers if they are too close to the vehicle alone could reduce accidents in Victoria.

**Transport Systems**, designed to assess and major satellite cities which, in The Safecar project will assess and University Accident Research Centre • a seatbelt reminder system that issues cent, saving about $155 million a year, © (research) were fitted with the Intelligent limits on all streets in Melbourne pedestrians. one of the 15 cars over 17,000 kilometres Commission (TAC) and Ford University researchers have found. The Systems include:

- a radar to assess the speed and proximity of vehicles in front of the driver, alerting drivers if they are too close to the vehicle in front of them;
- a onboard reminder system that issues both visual and spoken warning signals with increased intensity if any occupant is not wearing a seatbelt;

**in an electronic digital map of speed limits on all streets in Melbourne and major satellite cities which, in conjunction with global positioning, warns drivers via a visual display and upward pressure on the accelerator pedal if they are speeding;

- a sensor proximity sensor in the bumper that warns if the reversing car is about to hit other objects, including pedestrians.

The Safecar project will assess whether cars fitted with these systems make people drive more safely during cars have been fitted with a microchip to improve safety and reduce road conjunction with global positioning whether cars fitted with these systems effectiveness of the systems. As well, the study's likely to develop psychological disorders and the Australian Centre for Post-traumatic Medicine in collaboration with Health Services had not been deployed there.

**Advisory Committee.**

"There was concern that some of the exposures and experiences unique to the Gulf War, such as the possible exposure to depleted uranium, chemical or biological weapons, anti-biological warfare medications, or smoke and dust from burning oil wells, may have resulted in health problems among Australian Gulf War veterans," Professor Sim said. "But the study's most striking and consistent health finding was that they had developed more psychological disorders than the comparison group in the time since the Gulf War."

The highest increase in risk was for post-traumatic stress disorder, but veterans also more commonly demonstrated other anxiety disorders, skin disorders, fatigue and neurological, respiratory and other symptoms.

However, several objective measures of physical health, such as blood, liver and kidney tests, lung function testing and a test of fatigue, did not show any increased health risks for Gulf War veterans. Cancer and mortality rates were not elevated, and they were no more likely to have adverse pregnancy outcomes.

Associate Professor Makoko Sis, lead of the psychological and environmental health research at Monash, led the study, which was commissioned by the Department of Veterans' Affairs and overseen by a Scientific Advisory Committee.

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Building post-Soviet knowledge

Monash University's Faculty of Education is helping rebuild the education system in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan. Academics Professor Terri Seddon, Associate Professor Tony Townsend and Ms Marilyn Fleer are working with the Kazakhstan Department of Education on several projects designed to improve the education system.

The projects are being funded by the Soros Foundation, which is involved in a range of programs assisting new democracies around the world. "Kazakhstan, together with China and Russia, became a Soviet republic in 1936. It regained its independence in 1991 when the USSR disbanded," Professor Seddon said.

Until now, the country, which is still grappling through a process of democratisation, has had a Russian system of education. Monash was asked in late 2001 to help develop Kazakhstan's national curriculum framework, from early childhood through to the end of high school.

Professor Seddon, who is also dean of the faculty, said the curriculum was intended to be outcome-based - a system that establishes desired outcomes and then designs the curriculum to achieve those outcomes.

"Australia has been very progressive in developing outcome-based curricula, and Monash is recognised as a leader in this field," she said. "Kazakhstan has been interested in developing this kind of education system and so approached us to assist them."

Monash will also help Kazakhstan universities extend their teaching programs and establish master's programs in their education faculties.

Mammal-like reptile springs a surprise

Geoscience

A clumsy-looking animal that resembled a reptile but had a strong horned beak like a tunktie and a pair of tooth-like writh has been identified by Monash University scientists as surviving a mass extinction event that occurred about 250 million years ago.

Dr Tony Thulborn and Dr Susan Turner, honorary research associates in Monash University's School of Geosciences, have found that dicynodonts - mammal-like reptiles that dominated the Earth before the rise of the dinosaurs - survived for more than 100 million years after their supposed extinction 222 and 215 million years ago, and well beyond the mass extinction 200 million years ago that wiped out much of the world's species of animals.

Their findings were published last month in the Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, Series B (Biological Sciences).

Dr Thulborn and Dr Turner have identified a fossil specimen, stored in the Queensland Museum for almost 90 years, as a dicynodont that lived 105 million years ago.

The specimen, consisting of six fragments of fossil bone, was found in 1914 by Queensland politician Frederick L. Berney and landowner Robert Pool. They were collected from rocks near the town of Hughenden, in central Queensland.

The fragments are all from the left maxilla of a single skull. "We estimate that the intact skull would have been about 40 centimetres long," Dr Thulborn said. "The whole animal might have been about two metres long."

Although it was unexpected to find dicynodonts in rocks 105 million years old, Dr Thulborn said he and Dr Turner were not surprised by the identification.

"Every anatomical feature in the specimen is found in dicynodonts, there isn't a single exception," he said. "Some of the features are found only in dicynodonts - the characteristic beak, with its unique internal structure of nestled cones, and parts of the jaw margin and palate showing the areas of attachment for the horned beak. Conversely, we can't find even a single feature that would identify the fragments as something other than a dicynodont."

"This discovery more than doubles the known duration of dicynodont history. Previously, dicynodonts were known to have survived for about 65 million years. We now know that they survived very much longer - at least 170 million years - and became extinct much earlier, about 105 million years ago, or even later."

Dr Turner and Dr Thulborn will search for more dicynodonts on an expedition to central Queensland this year.

- Penny Fannin

Solar vehicles shine in show

Engineering

Race-winning model solar boats and cars from last year's Model Solar Vehicle Challenge are on display in Melbourne, offering inspiration to the hundreds of Victorian school students who have started building the vehicles they will enter in this year's challenge.

The challenge, organised by Monash University's Faculty of Engineering and Melbourne's Science Works museum, will be held as ScienceWorks in October. Last year's challenge attracted 300 entries - 100 cars and 200 boats.

Four model solar cars and six model solar boats are on display at the Centre for Innovation and Technology Commercialisation at 257 Collins Street, Melbourne. The exhibition will run until 14 April.

Mr Paul Wellington, chair of the Monash Engineering Model Solar Vehicle Challenge Committee, said the exhibition would also feature the first public display of a dynamometer, a device built by staff from Monash's Faculty of Engineering to measure the performance of model solar cars.

"With a dynamometer, the back wheels of a model car sit on a drum. When you wish to a light on above the car, the back wheels move and you can work out how far it will go with that amount of light," Mr Wellington said. "You can also simulate changes in light intensity and see how that affects the car's performance."

After featuring in the exhibition, the dynamometer will be installed at the Monash Science Centre on the University's Clayton campus.

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New courses 2004

Bachelor of Creative Arts - Gippsland and Clayton

Students of this three-year degree will be introduced to the intellectual and aesthetic aspects of creative arts. The degree has been specifically designed for people who may not have a design portfolio but can demonstrate a strong interest in the areas of creative arts. Students will study a number of areas including visual arts, design and digital art.

For more information, contact: +61 3 9902 6341 or email designuniversity@monash.edu.au

Bachelor of Environmental Technology - Gippsland

This four-year double degree aims to prepare students to be environmental professionals, offering a focus on the relevant sciences and technology. Students will study a number of areas including environmental science and technology.

For more information, contact: +61 3 9902 6454 or email environment@monash.edu.au

Bachelor of Nursing/Bachelor of Rural Health - Gippsland

This four-year double degree aims to prepare students for a career in rural nursing practice. It is identical to the Bachelor of Nursing during the first two years, after which it focuses on rural practice. Studies include counselling, rural health issues, Indigenous studies and multidisciplinary care.

For more information, contact: +61 3 9902 6454 or email nursing.university@monash.edu.au

Bachelor of Science Advanced (Honours) - Clayton

This four-year program is an advanced version of the Bachelor of Science, with a stronger entry requirement. Graduates plan for a research career or a major or double major in science. Research projects are an important feature of the course, commencing at undergraduate level and including a full year of advanced study.

For more information, contact: +61 3 9905 6024 or email enquiries.science@monash.edu.au
How the people of Southeast Asia interpret the war in Iraq - and Australia's involvement in it - may greatly influence the prospects for stability and good relations in the region for some years to come, argues Monash academic Mr Paul Thomas.

Australia's northern neighbours are rapidly growing concerned about reports coming from the war in Iraq. There appear little support for the war - on the streets, in government circles and in the media.

While the Filipinos have been the most vociferous in denouncing the US for its military actions in Iraq, and Indonesia has given somewhat subdued support of public opinion, these positions are not necessarily a reflection of public opinion in their respective countries. Singapore has had to be sensitive towards its large Muslim minority, while the Philippines has been concerned about ASEAN unity and the possibility of increased support for Muslim insurgencies in its south.

In Indonesia and Malaysia, there has been more complicity between the positions of government and the public. Indonesia has strongly condemned America's decision to get into Iraq, and it has undertaken a number of diplomatic initiatives designed to demonstrate its opposition. In Malaysia, the government has been even more urgent, with the Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, issuing what seem like daily statements condemning the war.

Underscoring this substantial opposition to the war are myriad concerns the danger of a downturn in the world economy; the collapse of the United Nations as the ultimate arbiter in world conflicts; the consequences of an embarrassed and capricious US; the potential for an expansion of the conflict into other countries; fear of substantial civilian casualties; and, perhaps more specific to the region, perceptions by Muslims that this is a war against Islam, or at least the very least influenced by paranoia towards Islam by the West.

The war in Iraq is, therefore, not seen in terms of the nature or history of Saddam Hussein's regime but in terms of the possible consequences of the war - a war both the Indonesian and Malaysian governments believe to be unjust and illegal.

So how does the Australian government's position of total and unquestioned support for the US, and to a large extent Australia, to go into Iraq, fit within this regional context? And does it matter?

In the eyes of many Southeast Asian nations, Australia remains a Western country. Therefore, a large extent, there was not a great deal of surprise that Australia would support the US position. However, among the political leaders of Southeast Asia, the unswerving nature of the support and the deployment of military troops into Iraq have raised many concerns.

Questions have also been raised in the region as to what Australia's priorities are in terms of security. Why go into Iraq when, to quote Australia's most recent Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper, "South-East Asia is where the threat of terrorism to Australian interests is most acute?"

Perhaps the government's strategic argument for Australia's current involvement in Iraq comes in Chapter 6 of the same document, entitled 'Strengthening the US Alliance'. In this chapter, it is made clear that Australia sees the US as its major military ally and that it needs to strengthen its relationship in the coming years.

Clearly, the American alliance is extremely important for Australia. The US has so far proved to be a dependable ally in terms of maintaining intelligence on the region as well as the weight its support has brought to the establishment of regional forums such as APEC. The diplomatic pressure it applied on Indonesia during the East Timor crisis should also not be discounted. There was the potential for real conflict in East Timor with Indonesia, and the US reluctance to send troops may well have influenced John Howard's belief that the military alliance with the US needed shoring up.

Nevertheless, a further strengthening of the US alliance will bring into question Australia's ability to act independently in its relations with its neighbours. Clearly, the reaction in the region to the widely reported comments of Australia acting as a 'deputy sheriff' for the US, true or otherwise, was a reflection of some of these concerns. Compounding this was the suggestion by the Prime Minister that pre-emptive strikes on terrorists in Southeast Asia was a real possibility. This was viewed as simply mimicking the US rhetoric. Now Australia's unquestioned support for the US in the war in Iraq appears to have confirmed Australia's willingness to follow its allies into any conflict, even when its own national interests may not directly be at risk.

Opposition in the streets to the war in Iraq will naturally focus on the US, with Australia being seen as a very minor player. However, among those that lead the region's political parties, religious and educational institutions and the many non-government organisations, there have been definite warnings of a possible deterioration in the relationship with Australia.

In a recent visit to Australia and again on his return to Indonesia, Haytam Mursaleh, dean of Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation - the Nahdlatul Ulama - called on Australia not to increase or provoke further tensions in the region by involving itself in the war in Iraq.

At this stage of the war, it would appear that Australia's relationship with its neighbours, or at least the governments of those countries, are holding up. Nevertheless, the region has been seriously threatened to break diplomatic ties, cut or downgrade cooperation in the fight against terrorism, reduce trade, or cut educational links. However, they have started to make a great deal of the goodwill and empathy we had received from the region post 9/11 bombings. Australia had been viewed as on this understanding, in its pursuit for a more secure and stable region. Any belief that the cooperation we have received so far is not at risk is simply delusional.

For Australia and its relationship with Southeast Asia, the war in Iraq due to be seen as a high-risk strategy. If it envisages a conflict with regime change and on the imposition of a Western political system in Iraq under an American-appointed administration, it will heighten opposition to the war throughout the Arab and Malay Muslim world. The danger is that the voice of the moderate may be diminished as the more extreme elements promote the view that America's hegemony is an attempt to impose the will of a superpower over the will of Allah. Recruitment by extremists of educated Indonesians and Malaysians with an ideological commitment against the West, which, if true, has not been particularly successful, may now be made much easier.

Australia needs to listen to the advice from moderate leaders and organisations in neighbouring countries, including the new security policy without the shills and means which have come in to form the fight on terrorism, to the world of weapons of mass destruction, and on to regime change. In Southeast Asia, and for many Australians, there are different definitions of national objectives.

Australia needs allies. In Australia, it has perhaps the most powerful military allies, but it can never be an equal partnership - and not can be, if it is to be providing. We can only hope that Australia finds a way to balance its American relationship with those that it claims are so important in the region.

This is an edited version of a presentation by Mr Paul Thomas at a forum on the War in Iraq, organised by the School of Humanities, Communications and Social Sciences at Monash's Gippsland campus. Mr Thomas has taught languages both in Australia and Southeast Asia for more than 10 years and established the Indonesian language major at the Gippsland campus.

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Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience

Inprint

Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience
Edited by Bain Attwood and S. G. Foster
Published by the National Museum of Australia
RRP: $35.95

While several books have been written about Australia’s involvement in conflict overseas, relatively little has been written about armed conflict within Australia. Based on a forum held at the National Museum of Australia, Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience presents a series of essays by leading contributors to the debate. Taken together, these essays contribute to the study of cross-cultural relations in Australia’s past and are valuable background for anyone who wishes to understand relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

Books featured in Inprint are available or can be ordered at Monash’s four on-campus bookshops.

Performance note: Dawn O’Hara’s performance of Nadia Wheatley’s adaptation of Roadworks will appeal to those who wish to understand the origins of songlines, and the consequences of pursuing them.

Leadership framework: Author
Dr Peter Gronn examines the new work of educational leaders.

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UK ceramist in residence at Art and Design

A leading ceramist from the UK is the latest participant in the Artist/Designer in Residence Program conducted by Monash University's Faculty of Art and Design. The artist is a recipient of the Jerwood Applied Arts Award, which recognises significant contribution to contemporary ceramics in Britain over a five-year period.

An exhibition of contemporary ceramic works is on show at the Faculty Gallery at Monash University's Clayton campus until 19 April. The exhibition includes pieces by Fiona Murphy, Gary Bish, Stephen Benwell, Michael Doctor and Kenda Draper, among others.

The exhibition demonstrates how contemporary artists working in the field of ceramics are firmly rooted in the traditional technical practices of the craft.

The Christian Brothers begins at Monash

Australia's highly acclaimed John Bell will direct Ron Blake's The Christian Brothers when it begins its 2003 national tour at Monash University's Clayton Theatre on 29 and 30 April. The very candid yet humorous play is being staged for the first time in Australia. John Bell will appear as the Christian Brother in charge of the boys' school, while Peter Carroll recreates the leading role in this one-man show. The character of the teaching Brother who captivates and baffles his pupils is so real through his history, French, literature, physics and Christian doctrine.

The exhibition of contemporary ceramic works is on show at the Faculty Gallery at Monash University's Clayton campus until 19 April. The exhibition includes pieces by Fiona Murphy, Gary Bish, Stephen Benwell, Michael Doctor and Kenda Draper, among others.

The exhibition demonstrates how contemporary artists working in the field of ceramics are firmly rooted in the traditional technical practices of the craft.

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**Students learn the art of communication**

**MEDICINE**

Good medicine is as much about effective communication as it is about anatomy, biology and genetics, Monash University first-year medical students are discovering.

During their first semester at Monash, each of the 215 students in the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences' clinical skills program interviews patients in preparation for their contact with the real thing.

The students get to practise their skills on the patients in tutorials before being placed at a general practice clinic or in a hospital ward.

Faculty lecturer Dr Debra Nestel said the program gave the students, most of whom were just out of secondary school, the opportunity to gain both confidence and experience in the relative security of a familiar setting.

She said receiving the correct training for the first contact with patients was crucial for the students to establish the patient's concerns and the reasons for the visit and to style their questions to the supervising doctor.

"In many respects, communication is the core clinical skill," Dr Nestel said. "It is very important that students learn at an early stage to value the patient's perspective, especially before they are overwhelmed by learning about the medical situation."

**Art of communication:** 'Patient' Mrs Diianne Turner, right, is helping students in the medical faculty learn how to communicate before they are placed in general practice clinics or hospital wards.

**BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE**

The yellow crazy ants that have been decimating Christmas Island's world-renowned red crab population and damaging the island's ecology have been stopped in their tracks by an aerial baiting campaign developed by a team from Monash University and Parks Australia.

The team has worked to all and wipe out the supercolonies of crazy ants that were first detected in the island's rainforest in 1998.

Monash researchers and students, led by Dr Dennis O'Dowd, a reader in the School of Biological Sciences, have spent the past three years evaluating the ants' destructive effects on the red crabs - famous for their annual migration - and the island's ecosystem.

"It quickly became obvious that my research was needed to save the red crabs as they were decimating the island's ecosystem and had killed or displaced an estimated 15 to 20 million crabs by occupying their burrows, killing and consuming resident crabs, and using their burrowing to create nests," Dr O'Dowd said. "We tested six different baits on red crab populations by 50 per cent, it also caused a rapid shift in the island's forest structure and composition, endangering many of the species unique to Christmas Island."

In 2001, Monash and Parks Australia completed an exhaustive survey of Christmas Island to determine the full extent of the crazy ants' infestations and associated impacts on red crabs. This showed that, since their accidental introduction to the island some time before 1934, crazy ants had infested about 2500 hectares — or 25 per cent — of forest on Christmas Island.

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