Breast-feeding may protect against SIDS

Baby health research

Breast-fed babies arouse more readily from their sleep and active sleep. Active sleep is equivalent to REM (rapid eye movement) sleep in adults, which is a deep sleep and when dreaming occurs. Quiet sleep is similar to non-REM sleep.

"People have queried which sleep state is the most important survival mechanism that may be impaired in victims of SIDS. Although education programs to encourage parents to put babies to sleep on their backs and protecting babies from exposure to passive smoke have been effective in reducing the number of SIDS cases worldwide, it remains the major cause of death in infants aged between one month and one year," Dr Rosemary Horne and colleagues from the Department of Paediatrics and the Ritchie Institute of Reproduction and Development have investigated whether breast-fed infants wake more readily from sleep than formula-fed infants. Their research has been published in the Archives of Disease in Childhood.

"Babies have two basic sleep states – quiet sleep and active sleep. Active sleep is equivalent to REM (rapid eye movement) sleep in adults, which is a deep sleep and when dreaming occurs. Quiet sleep is similar to non-REM sleep. "People have queried which sleep state is the most dangerous for babies," Dr Horne said. "In quiet sleep, babies have more control over their physiology - their breathing and heart rate are quite regular. But in active sleep their breathing and heart rate are irregular and often babies will stop breathing for short periods of time. It appears that SIDS babies may be unable to arouse themselves and start breathing again.

Their research has been published in the Archives of Disease in Childhood. The researchers found no difference in the physiology - their breathing and heart rate are quite regular. But in active sleep their breathing and heart rate are irregular and often babies will stop breathing for short periods of time. It appears that SIDS babies may be unable to arouse themselves and start breathing again.

"We also believe that babies who die from SIDS die toward the morning, which is when they have more active sleep." Dr Horne and her colleagues Dr Pete Pavlove, Ms Dottta Forrer, Ms Annemaree Watts and Associate Professor Michael Adamson - studied 43 healthy full-term infants aged two to four weeks, two to three months and five to six months.

"We found that breast-fed infants were more easily aroused from active sleep as compared to quiet sleep at any of the three ages studied. "These study results support breast-feeding as one of the most important survival mechanisms that may be impaired in victims of SIDS," Dr Horne said. "Two to four months is the age at which the risk of SIDS is greatest. Very few babies die under one month, and the number dramatically decreases after four to five months."

The researchers found no difference in the arousal responses of breast and breast-fed babies during quiet sleep at any of the three ages studied. These study results support breast-feeding of infants during the critical risk period for SIDS, as reduced arousal, particularly in active sleep, could impair the ability of an infant to respond appropriately to a life-threatening situation," Dr Horne said.

Contact: rosemary.horne@med.monash.edu.au
Ph: +61 3 9594 6100

Water on tap - at a price

Conservation

The low cost of mains water is contributing to the failure of consumers to install conservation equipment such as rainwater storage tanks and grey water filters, Monash researchers claim.

Research by Mr Dwight Chapman and Mr Matthew Lokot, undertaken during their honours year at Monash's School of Applied Sciences and Engineering at the university's Clayton campus, found that water is too cheap, making it uneconomical for households to install conservation equipment.

The cost of lifting, and installing, a rainwater tank is probably not more than $2000, but it doesn't make much sense when water out of the tap is still so cheap.

The only truly effective method of initiating water conservation at the consumer level was through pricing changes, he said. "Our water resources are limited and we are rapidly approaching the point where we will have exploited all available suitable surface water catchments."

If Melbourne continues to use water at the current rate, the storages and water prices could be out of catchment and grey water filters, Monash rainwater tanks and grey water filters, Monash researchers claim.

Their research acknowledged the cost and environmental factors proscribe building more dams or diverting rivers and streams.

"But one of Melbourne's major sources of water, rainwater, is thrown away at night," Mr Lokot said. "If some of this water was stored in domestic water tanks and used for watering gardens, it would directly reduce the demand on our reservoirs and water delivery systems."

The average household uses 35 per cent of its water for outside purposes, mainly garden watering, 26 per cent in the bathroom, 19 per cent to flush the toilet, 15 per cent in the laundry and 10 per cent in the kitchen, according to WaterSmart, the Victorian Government's water conservation strategy.

A typical four-person family, as a consumer of City West Water, one of Melbourne's four water retailers, pays $250 per year for 300,000 litres of water. "We suggest a user-pay tariff for around the first 300,000 litres, then increasing the tariff according to the amount of water used," Mr Lokot said. "At 300 litres, for example, a user who consumes 1000 litres per month would pay 25 per cent more than the current bill."

"For instance, under level four water restrictions, the volumetric charge could rise by a few cents or a percentage per 1000 litres, and under level four restrictions, water charges could be increased by as much as double. That way people would be forced to recognise the relative importance of conserving water, depending on the storage levels, and they would have good, solid financial incentives for doing so."

Mr Chapman, who graduated recently, and Mr Lokot, who is completing a masters degree, have been awarded the 2004 Yarra Valley Water Prize for their research.

Contact: robyn.anns@monash.edu.au
From the vice-chancellor's desk

A new monthly column by the vice-chancellor of Monash University, Professor Richard Larkins

Top economist takes three titles

It is a challenging time for universities. The Higher Education Support Act (HESA) was renegotiated at the last session of Parliament last year and a new agreement with the rest of the Australian universities has to be worked out on how to respond to it.

Education and research make a major contribution to the economic development of the country, as there is a strong argument for substantially more public investment in our universities.

Moreover, there is evidence from other countries that high levels of student debt can lead to career decisions more likely to be based on what is most financially rewarding rather than on what affords most community benefit.

It is, however, clear that with the advent of any political party to increase ties to the trend worldwide has been for students to make an increasing contribution to the cost of their education.

With almost 50 per cent of young people now accessing higher education, the Whitley model of free university education for all who qualify is a distant memory. The HESA does provide a real increase in government funding and also a number of equity measures including raising the HECS repayment threshold to $35,000, a new HECS-like loan scheme for Australian fee-based students and a significant expansion in equity measures.

Professor Phillip Steele has taken up his new appointment as the first academic director of the Monash University Berwick campus.

Professor Steele is also academic director of Peninsula campus and will divide his time equally between the two posts.

"My appointment provides the opportunity for a lot more synergy between the Berwick and Peninsula campuses," he said.

"I think we will get a better result this way. Both campuses will have more coordination of planning and communication, because we can view the two campuses together. I will work with my colleagues at Berwick and Peninsula to help define and build an exciting agenda for teaching, research and community engagement at both campuses.

Professor Steele said the outer urban campuses provided special opportunities for promotion of Monash.

"As the public representative of both the Peninsula and Monash as a whole, to the world community," he said.

"I also see myself working closely with colleagues at both locations, having a foot in each camp to ensure that the teaching, research and community engagement activities of the two campuses are aligned with the university's strategic directions."

In March last year, Professor Rob Willis and Professor Steele were appointed as part-time academic directors of Caulfield and Peninsula campuses respectively, following the retirement of Mr John White, who had been campus director for both locations.

When Professor Steele took up the Peninsula appointment, he was also associate dean (development) in the Faculty of Information Technology. He has now relinquished that role so he can divide his time equally between the Berwick and Peninsula campuses.

Contact: medialink@monash.edu.au

Briefly

Volcanic crater research link to climate change

New studies of deposits in a Queensland volcanic crater show the potential for rainfall in the tropical Pacific to forcing global climate change, a team of international researchers, including Monash University's Professor Peter Kershaw, has found.

Results from the study of a sediment core from Lake Kerhuel near the Great Western Tableday in north-east Queensland presented the traditional view that changes in the North Atlantic region have dictated global climate variation, said Professor Kershaw, from Monash School of Geography and Environmental Science.

The study, published in Nature, has produced a detailed, well-dated record of climate variability, inferred from changes in pollen communities, charcoal abundance and degree of decomposition in organic matter detected in the sediment core, over the past 10,000 years.

New technology leads to $13m spray-on drug deal

A company created after scientists at Monash University's Pharmacy Faculty invented a method for direct depositing of drugs to the skin has secured a multimillion dollar contract to develop its drug delivery system for treating skin infections and macular degeneration.

Across Eyre Ltd secured the US$13.5 million deal with VITTUS Inc, a world leader in the research, development and commercialisation of products to restore sexual function.

Dr Bruce Reid, a senior lecturer in the Department of Pharmacology, and his colleague Professor Barry Reed discovered that successfull penetration of compounds through the skin. This led to the development and licensing of their transdermal spray technology, which allows drugs to be delivered through the skin.

IR expert to lead school

An industrial relations expert and former barrister with the High Court of New Zealand has taken the helm at the School of Business and Economics at Monash South Africa.

Professor Brian Brooks, who has been appointed head of school for three years, has worked in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa in academic, government and private appointments. He said he aimed to make the Business and Economics School the best teaching and research school in the country.

"While I am looking forward to doing more teaching, my main role will be to make sure my staff can teach and research effectively," he said. "I am a great believer in high education, and Monash South Africa is a place where I believe I can do good for some time.

Keeping things green

Dry cleaning with water only, paper making without megaltars of waste, computer chips without toxic waste - the public should demand these things today as the techniques to provide it already exists, says Professor Joseph DeSimone, the first Monash North American Fellow for 2004.

Professor DeSimone visited Monash University last month as part of the Monash University North America Steering Group's strategy to foster collaborative research links and exchanges between the university and North American research institutions. He is professor of chemistry at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and professor of chemical engineering at North Carolina State University.

Memorial scholarships

Monash University has awarded the first two Monash North American Memorial Scholarships established following the tragic shooting at Monash's Clayton campus in October 2002.

The scholarships given in memory of two students who lost their lives and to acknowledge the bravery of staff and students during the shooting.

Contact: monash.edu.au
A one-degree increase in regional temperature could advance the flowering dates of plants by 16 days at the start of spring and 11 days at the end of spring, geoscientist Malcolm Clark-Thompson of the University of Edinburgh and his team have predicted. The model predicts the effect of global warming could advance the first flowering date by 16 days at the start of spring and 11 days at the end of spring, particularly increases in temperature, could advance the first flowering date by more than a month, says Dr Clark. 'Put simply, the plants hibernate explained variations in flowering times are significantly advanced, there could be substantial ecological repercussions.'

"For example, some birds migrate thousands of kilometres to feed on flowering plants, and the plants rely on these birds to distribute their pollen. If the birds arrive after flowering has started, they will have less nectar to feed on and the plants' reproduction will be affected." Researcher Dr Rosemary Calder and MPA executive officer Ms Jenny Reeder said from other institutions into its studies to treat schizophrenia patients each applied a transdermal oestrogen patch every day for 28 days as an adjunct to their existing medication. "We are now in the process of analyzing the data collected during that trial, and the results look positive," she said.

In another recent study, she looked at the effect of Tamoosfen - an oestrogen-suppressing drug used to treat breast cancer - on 15 women with manic symptoms, because of theories that oestrogens in women with bipolar disorder. Professor Kulkarni said "I thought it might be worth exploring those subjective observations of patients, to arrive at a better explanation of schizophrenia and improved treatment that was intuitively tailored to what the patient tells you," Professor Kulkarni said. "It's heart-warming. We have had some very pronounced improvements in women who, having very severe schizophrenia, had tried everything else available. As a clinician, that's awesome." Professor Kulkarni said oestrogen also works in the brain in the same way in both sexes.

$1.4 million for hormone studies to treat psychosis

"What is very interesting to me is that we have had no trouble recruiting women to our studies. It seems to make such intuitive sense for the women and their carers to use anti-oestrogen treatment for psychotic illnesses," she said. It's heart-warming. We have had some very pronounced improvements in women who, having very severe schizophrenia, had tried everything else available. As a clinician, that's awesome. Professor Kulkarni said oestrogen also alleviates psychotic symptoms in men because it works in the brain in the same way in both sexes.

"It's heart-warming. We have had some very pronounced improvements in women who, having very severe schizophrenia, had tried everything else available. As a clinician, that's awesome." Professor Kulkarni said oestrogen also alleviates psychotic symptoms in men because it works in the brain in the same way in both sexes.
The first Experience Monash wish to take part in practical sessions organised by Monash Dame Elisabeth Murdoch state premier Mr John Cain, academic staff. Activities have paid tribute to Monash chancellor Mr Jerry Ellis, who had been aware of Sir Louis' achievements at Monash for some time.

The event also provided an opportunity to meet the new artistic director of the Monash University Museum of Art, Mr Max Delany, who took up his appointment in 2004.

At the ceremony, Sir Louis and Lady Matheson were both strong supporters of the arts and committed the university to make contributions to the arts every year.

In memory of Sir Louis Matheson

Dame Elizabeth Murdoch AC DBE paid tribute to Monash University's founding vice-chancellor, Sir Louis Matheson, at an official ceremony in appreciation of the work.

Professor Larkins said he had been aware of Sir Louis' impressive achievements at Monash for some time. "But it's only since I've been here that I have truly appreciated the achievements of Sir Louis – not only did he and his colleagues build an extensive university at the forefront of research and political innovations, but the international agenda was also very much underestimated," he said.

Sir Louis and Lady Matheson were both strong supporters of the arts and committed the university to make contributions to the arts every year.

At the ceremony, Sir Louis and Lady Matheson were both strong supporters of the arts and committed the university to make contributions to the arts every year.

The event also provided an opportunity to meet the new artistic director of the Monash University Museum of Art, Mr Max Delany, who took up his appointment in 2004.

At the ceremony, Sir Louis and Lady Matheson were both strong supporters of the arts and committed the university to make contributions to the arts every year.

In memory of Sir Louis Matheson

Dame Elizabeth Murdoch AC DBE paid tribute to Monash University's founding vice-chancellor, Sir Louis Matheson, at an official ceremony in appreciation of the work.

Professor Larkins said he had been aware of Sir Louis' achievements at Monash for some time. "But it's only since I've been here that I have truly appreciated the achievements of Sir Louis – not only did he and his colleagues build an extensive university at the forefront of research and political innovations, but the international agenda was also very much underestimated," he said.

Sir Louis and Lady Matheson were both strong supporters of the arts and committed the university to make contributions to the arts every year.

At the ceremony, Sir Louis and Lady Matheson were both strong supporters of the arts and committed the university to make contributions to the arts every year.

In memory of Sir Louis Matheson

Dame Elizabeth Murdoch AC DBE paid tribute to Monash University's founding vice-chancellor, Sir Louis Matheson, at an official ceremony in appreciation of the work.

Professor Larkins said he had been aware of Sir Louis' achievements at Monash for some time. "But it's only since I've been here that I have truly appreciated the achievements of Sir Louis – not only did he and his colleagues build an extensive university at the forefront of research and political innovations, but the international agenda was also very much underestimated," he said.

Sir Louis and Lady Matheson were both strong supporters of the arts and committed the university to make contributions to the arts every year.

At the ceremony, Sir Louis and Lady Matheson were both strong supporters of the arts and committed the university to make contributions to the arts every year.

In memory of Sir Louis Matheson

Dame Elizabeth Murdoch AC DBE paid tribute to Monash University's founding vice-chancellor, Sir Louis Matheson, at an official ceremony in appreciation of the work.

Professor Larkins said he had been aware of Sir Louis' achievements at Monash for some time. "But it's only since I've been here that I have truly appreciated the achievements of Sir Louis – not only did he and his colleagues build an extensive university at the forefront of research and political innovations, but the international agenda was also very much underestimated," he said.

Sir Louis and Lady Matheson were both strong supporters of the arts and committed the university to make contributions to the arts every year.

At the ceremony, Sir Louis and Lady Matheson were both strong supporters of the arts and committed the university to make contributions to the arts every year.

In memory of Sir Louis Matheson

Dame Elizabeth Murdoch AC DBE paid tribute to Monash University's founding vice-chancellor, Sir Louis Matheson, at an official ceremony in appreciation of the work.

Professor Larkins said he had been aware of Sir Louis' achievements at Monash for some time. "But it's only since I've been here that I have truly appreciated the achievements of Sir Louis – not only did he and his colleagues build an extensive university at the forefront of research and political innovations, but the international agenda was also very much underestimated," he said.

Sir Louis and Lady Matheson were both strong supporters of the arts and committed the university to make contributions to the arts every year.
Easing the pain of the final journey

While Australian expertise in palliative care to ease the suffering of dying people has developed rapidly over the past 20 years, there is still a long way to go, writes Professor Margaret O'Connor, who holds the inaugural Vivian Bullwinkel chair in palliative care nursing at Monash.

In Australia there is much work to be undertaken in palliative care. There are still people in our community who are not dying well and who, for many and varied reasons, are not accessing the best care they could.

For example, people with diseases other than cancer, such as end-stage heart disease or motor neurone disease, still do not get easy access or equitable access to palliative care services. While the reasons for this are unclear, it is thought that an uncertain prognosis and the demands on service providers for high levels of care might be some of the issues. Surprisingly too, given the amount of information available about palliative care and its demonstrated benefits for terminally ill people and their carers, lack of timely referral by health professionals also remains an issue.

This may be because of ignorance, or health professionals' unwillingness to take a multidisciplinary view of the holistic needs of the terminally ill person and their family.

Our society is at once abhorred and fascinated by death; thus death and dying issues are still not the stuff of easy conversation, even in some health care circles. Because of this there are still people who, unaware of the needs of support that can be offered through palliative care services, may be driven to end their own life, viewing this as the only way to relieve their suffering.

Although the care of dying people has always been seen to be different to the care provided in acute settings (as evidenced by the number of well-established hospices throughout Australia), its more recent development during the 1970s and 1980s as a specialty area of health care was in response to a perceived need for more active intervention in assisting the dying person and their family in this final phase of life.

So, using a holistic model of care, physical symptom management remains a paramount skill for the clinical palliative care professional. But because the psychological, spiritual and social aspects of care are important, other health professionals who work on palliative care teams include social workers, psychologists, pastoral workers and physical therapists. In many settings volunteers provide a vital role by reminding health care professionals that dying is a human event. Dying does not always require health care intervention, but it will always need human support — someone to sit with people and support them in their final journey.

As in all areas of health care, funding levels and models are of ongoing concern to palliative care providers. While services wish to respond to needs in a timely and effective manner, there is a tension between the levels of need and what can be provided under current funding arrangements and with current models of care.

An increasing community awareness of services, the broadening of palliative care expertise to encompass care for more than cancer, and the ageing population all cause palliative care providers to be continually reviewing models and practices of care.

While not all dying people require palliative care, the expertise might be readily available to those who do require such care. So flexible models and those that encourage the generous sharing of expertise are two aspects of how palliative care will face the challenges of future demand.

There has been a rapid development of palliative care expertise at all levels in Australia over the past 20 years. Australia is well placed to meet the future service delivery challenges, from internationally respected research programs and significant work on service delivery models.

In relation to research, issues about how we can best deliver palliative care are indicative of an evolving discipline and of a discipline that can adapt to changing social times and individual needs. There has been much change in the short life of palliative care, particularly in the way services have become more part of mainstream health services and palliative care knowledge has become more widely disseminated.

But there has been little analysis on whether these changes have improved care for the dying. For example, does the service system work well when a person needs to move from home to the acute hospital or vice versa? Is there enough support for a person receiving care at home and how is this known? There are increasingly relevant areas of research about the applicability of palliative care for those people with illnesses other than cancer, for people dying in aged care facilities, and in addressing some of the ethical issues that arise in end of life care.

The discipline of palliative care is coming of age — establishing its place in health care, crossing linkages with other services that a terminally ill person might need, becoming more known in the general community and assuming its increasingly public role in advocating for the needs of dying people. Being a relatively new area means the pioneering excitement and challenges are not so far beneath the surface of hard work for those committed to seeing that all Australians have access to the best care at the end of life.
**Designer's 4sight recognised**

A visionary design concept that provided a window into the everyday lives of the blind and visually impaired has resulted in a Monash visual communication student winning the 2003 Saxton Scholars conceptual design competition.

Christopher Yuen, 23, who completed honours at the university’s Caulfield campus last year, received a $5000 travel voucher for his project titled "Photography by People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired". The project culminated in an exhibition of photographs accompanied by written descriptions at Melbourne’s Ian Potter Gallery.

Mr Yuen’s project aimed to increase awareness of visually impaired population by giving an insight into the lives of the participants.

With assistance from the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, Mr Yuen contacted 16 blind or vision impaired people interested in taking part in the project. Each person was given a disposable camera and asked to photographically document elements of their lives.

Themes included self-portrait, personal space, favourite object, happy thoughts and last year. The featured photographs ranged from a quirky picture of a toilet, with the caption 'I think this is supposed to be my lunch', to an abstract image of a toilet, with the caption 'I am a toilet'. The works are for sale and can be viewed at the book. Enriched by Seoul experience

**Awards**

Christopher Yuen’s award-winning look at the everyday lives of blind and vision-impaired people. Photo: Greg Ford

**Enriched by Seoul experience**

Graphic designer as social commentator:

Christopher Yuen’s award-winning look at the everyday lives of blind and vision-impaired people. Photo: Greg Ford

**Enriched by Seoul experience**

A Monash University honours graduate in visual communications has recently returned from a two-month internship in Seoul, South Korea, with global branding and design company Interbrand.

Mr Sabrina Mnaima, who completed honours in 2002, was selected from a shortlist of fourth-year students of the visual communication course for the award. She worked with a team of Interbrand designers to develop a look and feel for the company.

Mr Mnaima said her internship was the first to be offered to an international student.

The internship was organised by Mr Russell Kennedy, coordinator of the visual communication course at Caulfield, in conjunction with Professor Don Chang, a professor of branding and design management at the Department of Visual Communication Design at Hong Kong University in Seoul. Professor Chang was also a director of Interbrand Korea.

"This was a great opportunity for Ms Mnaima to work for one of the world’s largest brand organisations," Mr Kennedy said. "It was also a privilege for her to move and work with a designer of Professor Chang’s reputation."

Although the Interbrand internship program has been in existence for about seven years, Ms Mnaima’s internship was the first to be offered to an international student.

Ms Mnaima’s time at Interbrand was overseen by Professor Chang.

"Interbrand hoped the cultural exchange that would take place between the local Korean staff and the young designer would generate mutual energy for creativity as well as a new perspective in terms of implementing these design processes," Professor Chang said.

"Ms Mnaima was selected on a combination of a superb portfolio and a statement of intent that reflected her future ambitions in this profession, "He was looking for a proactive attitude and an open willingness to experience travel and new working environments."

Mr Kennedy is hopeful future collaborations between the faculty and other institutions will follow.

"Monash is interested in building relationships with individuals and organisations who represent international excellence in the field of design practice and design education. Interbrand, Hong Kong University and Professor Chang are prime examples."

End.
Some young doctors consider geriatric medicine dull, partly because they feel they cannot make any real difference to patient outcomes. The reality, says Professor Workman, couldn’t be more different.

"Traditionally, geriatrics has not been viewed as a very exciting field at all," says Professor Barbara Workman, head of geriatric medicine at Monash University and director of the Monash Aging Research Centre, based at the Kingston Centre in Cheltenham, south-east of Melbourne.

"Elderly people are prone to a range of conditions – from arthritis and osteoporosis to cardiovascular disease, poor vision, constipation problems and lack of muscle strength, so geriatric medicine is extraordinarily challenging and interesting," she says.

"In addition, there are increasing opportunities for research – clinical research as well as looking at the aging mechanisms, chronic pain management and various new drug treatments for dementia, the most debilitating geriatric condition."

Professor Workman, who coordinates the undergraduate teaching of geriatric medicine at Monash, says the new five-year medical course, introduced in 2002, has an increased emphasis on geriatric conditions as well as social, legal and ethical issues in medicine.

"As a result, there is no real difference to patient outcomes. The reality, says Professor Workman, couldn’t be more different. Older patients often have multiple, complex conditions that require careful consideration."

"Elderly people are prone to a range of conditions – from arthritis and osteoporosis to cardiovascular disease, poor vision, constipation problems and lack of muscle strength, so geriatric medicine is extraordinarily challenging and interesting," she says.

"In addition, there are increasing opportunities for research – clinical research as well as looking at the aging mechanisms, chronic pain management and various new drug treatments for dementia, the most debilitating geriatric condition."

"Geriatric specialists will increasingly be in demand, so we need to encourage more doctors into the field," she says. "And we first must establish why it is less appealing than other areas, as last year we sought and won funding to survey young doctors about their attitudes towards treating older patients and vice versa."

"Geriatric specialists will increasingly be in demand, so we need to encourage more doctors into the field," she says. "And we first must establish why it is less appealing than other areas, as last year we sought and won funding to survey young doctors about their attitudes towards treating older patients and vice versa."

Professor Workman believes the survey of 20 interns and 100 elderly patients, which started in April in hospitals throughout Melbourne, will reveal that some young doctors consider geriatric medicine dull, partly because they feel they cannot make any real difference to patient outcomes.

The reality, says Professor Workman, couldn’t be more different. Older patients often have multiple, complex conditions that require careful consideration. Practical issues such as lighting, background noise, camera and screen positions at both ends, the strategy seems to be working.

"I have been able to provide full consultations, talking with the patients about their conditions and whether they’re experiencing pain – and I can also see if a patient is wining but claiming she doesn’t have pain in a particular area,” Professor Workman says. "And the patient can see me, which is equally important for credibility and feeling comfortable."

Pain management is one of the biggest challenges facing geriatricians and is a particular interest of Professor Workman, who is also director of the Pain Clinic at Kingston Centre.

In an Australian first, she is pioneering a specialist care for chronic pain. The clinic is also exploring the possibility of using video phones for the consultations, which can provide top-quality images.

"We have been able to provide full consultations, taking with the patients about their conditions and whether they’re experiencing pain – and I can also see if a patient is wining but claiming she doesn’t have pain in a particular area,” Professor Workman says. "And the patient can see me, which is equally important for credibility and feeling comfortable."

The clinic is also exploring the possibility of using video phones for the consultations, which can provide top-quality images.

Contact: Assistant Professor Peteris Darzins, at peteris.darzins@med.monash.edu.au. Ph: +61 3 9265 1426.
Risk alert on boating and water sports

Accident research

The under-reporting of injuries from boating and water sport accidents is disguising the extent of the problem in Victoria, a new report from the Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC) has found.


The report is the first comprehensive look at data from a number of sources, including the Marine Incident Database, the National Coroners’ and Coroners’ Information System and the Victorian hospital-based injury surveillance databases.

Activities covered include recreational boating, water skiing, personal watercraft riding, rowing, canoeing, kayaking, sailing and kiteboarding, as well as scuba diving and snorkelling. The injuries and deaths occurred in both coastal and inland waters.

The report revealed there were 18 deaths (all drownings), 205 hospital admissions and at least 517 emergency department presentations for injuries between July 2000 and July 2002.

But senior research fellow at MUARC Ms Cassell said many injuries were being missed because several large hospitals in popular water sport areas — including Sandringham, Wodonga, Swan Hill and Hamilton — have only recently been included on the emergency department database.

The study also found that of those who drowned:

- 66 per cent were fishing from a boat, 28 per cent were boating, 17 per cent were kayaking or canoeing, and 5 per cent were riding a personal watercraft.

- 83 per cent had a personal flotation device with them when retrieved from the water;

- alcohol was involved in 28 per cent of cases.

The study also found that males represented more than three-quarters of those injured and over 90 per cent of deaths.

Ms Cassell said boating and water sport enthusiasts needed to be aware that injuries can be catastrophic, mainly due to the speed involved, for instance in water skiing and personal watercraft riding.

“Serious head and spinal injuries, leg fractures, sprains and strains of legs and ankles, and open wounds to the face and head are among the most common injuries resulting from boating and water sports.”

Ms Cassell said the report highlighted the need for further research on causes and preventive strategies, particularly given the popularity of boating-related sport and recreational activities in Victoria.

— Allison Harding

Contact:
emos.cassell@genera.monash.edu.au
Ph: +61 3 9905 1857
erin.cassell@genera.monash.edu.au
Ph: +61 3 9905 2097

Asia Institute

The Monash Asia Institute (MAI) is about to begin collaborative research projects to improve literacy and learning and reduce mass poverty in Asia, following its first annual international conference in Mumbai, India, earlier this year.

MAI director Professor Marika Vicziany said the conference, on cultures and technologies in Asia, included a cast of about 50 scholars and Asian experts from Australia, India, Malaysia, Japan and Finland who exchanged ideas and research papers. The academic disciplines represented included anthropology, medicine, sociology, Asian studies, chemistry, education, communication and information technology.

Also in attendance were representatives from a number of leading Australian and Indian companies including Ansell, one of the world’s largest producers of barrier products; Tata Group, the third largest Indian business house; Nescore Solutions, a major Mumbai-based IT company; and Delhi’s NITT, the world’s largest trainer of IT labour at all levels.

Professor Vicziany said the three-day conference in mid-February was a highly focused event that brought together influential academics in the field of cultures and technologies in Asia.

“The emphasis was on an intense exchange of intellectual ideas, with the key objective of developing research collaborations with leading scholars in Asia, and several such collaborations have now been set up,” Professor Vicziany said.

“Professor Hussein Alatas and Professor A. B. Shamsuddin, based at the University of Kebangsaan in Malaysia, both influential thinkers about the impact of colonial rule on the long-term development prospects of Asia, have agreed to work with the MAI in developing a series of papers about Orientalism.

“Orientalism describes an approach to the study of Asia that either glorifies or condemns Asian society and values. The new series seeks to establish a critique of Orientalism and a more balanced assessment of the interaction between Asia and the West.”

“One of India’s best known economists, Professor AK Sughi, director of the Institute of Development Studies in Kolkata, will be collaborating with us on a project using IT to improve mass literacy and learning in Asia.

“And the MAI will also be working with the University of Madras’s Dr Sirpa Tenhunen, a leading specialist on rural poverty, on research about the potential of IT to reduce mass poverty in rural Asia.”

Professor Vicziany said another important outcome of the conference was the establishment of an Asia on Asia Network involving the MAI, the University of Kebangsaan, Monash University Malaysia, the Kolkata Institute of Development Studies, the University of Pune in western India, Jawaharlal Nehru University and the University of Mumbai.

It is planned to increase the network to include further key research centres in other Asian countries including Thailand and Indonesia. The project is planned to increase the network to include further key research centres in other Asian countries including Thailand and Indonesia.

Based on the conference data, the report, titled Men and Women Apart — Partnering in Australia, revealed that marriage and partnering rates have plummeted over the past decade.

The figures showed that in 1976, 72 per cent of women aged 35 to 39 had been married; by 2001 the comparable figures were 55 per cent for women and 67 per cent for men.

According to the report, most of the partnering decline among women occurred in the ranks of those without university degrees for men, the partnering decline was most marked among those on low incomes who were also largely without university degrees.