Metro North Health

Message from the
Acting Chief Executive and Executive Director Research

Dr Elizabeth Rushbrook | Prof Steven Lane

Summary:

- Research Excellence Awards - winner announcement

Message feedback

Audience: All staff   Read: 10 min   For: Information

Dear colleagues,

We are pleased to announce the winners of the 2025 Research Excellence Awards. Please take a moment to join me in congratulating our winners, who we celebrated together with at the recent Research Excellence Awards ceremony.

Metro North continues to be a leader in health and medical research and we are very proud of the impressive work recognised by our winners and finalists.

Professor Joan Webster Nursing and Midwifery Award

Winner: Associate Professor Lauren Kearney

Associate Professor Lauren Kearney's research is centred on maternal-newborn health, with a strong emphasis on co-designing research with consumers to ensure relevance and impact. She conceptualised and led the Metro North arm of the GROW study, working with consumers and frontline maternity clinicians across RBWH, Redcliffe and Caboolture hospitals to set five key research priorities in the first year of her role. She has been instrumental in contributing to a national consumer led program of work regarding the elimination of weight stigma in maternity care.

Lauren has 51 peer-reviewed manuscripts published in the past five years and over 700 citations. She has had more than $3 million in competitive funding since 2020, including being a Chief Investigator on a MRFF funded randomised controlled trial. Lauren is currently supervising five PhD students and three honours students (one of whom is a midwife from Caboolture hospital), with six PhD students supervised to completion. Lauren is highly committed to growing capacity with the midwifery teams and has extended opportunities for collaboration in research with several clinical staff.

Lauren has led a program of work optimising maternal hydration during labour (aligned with research priority two in the consumer established research priorities of GROW). Following an initial audit study, she led a program of work to reduce unnecessary use of intravenous fluids in labour, through co-design of an oral hydration intervention. This program of work has resulted in five peer-reviewed publications, two manuscripts under review, the successful completion of a pilot RCT (the FLUME trial) and planned national grant application.

Finalists

- Dr Natasha Roberts
- Professor Samantha Keogh

Research Implementation Award

Winner: Co-designing a nested diabetes service for adults living with Cystic Fibrosis and Diabetes

Team Members: Dr Shanal Kumar, Angela Matson, Vanessa Moore, Felicity Loel, Dr Daniel Smith

Metro North facility: The Prince Charles Hospital

This project was completed at the Adult Cystic Fibrosis Centre at The Prince Charles Hospital to ensure changing clinical needs were met in the era of Cystic Fibrosis (CF) modulator therapies for adults living with CF. Consumer partnership translated into high uptake of the model-of-care, with 76.7% of eligible adults engaging with the CF Diabetes MOC within the first year of operationalisation. Beyond clinical metrics, patient feedback revealed a strong sense of empowerment, reduced treatment burden, and improved care continuity. The team's efforts have informed CF clinical care delivery at the ACFC and are being considered for adaptation across other CF sites and chronic disease clinics.

Finalists

- Evaluation of a hub-and-spoke model of care for the delivery of sleep disorder services to a remote Australian community using the RE-AIM framework.
- Increasing the availably of ultrasound-guided vascular access through research, implementation and education.

Discovery Research Award

Winner: Application of machine learning to swallowing sounds to better detect aspiration in infants and children

Team Members: Adj Associate Professor Thuy Frakking, Dr Belinda Schwerin, Dr Stephen So, Dr Seiji Humphries, Professor Anne Chang, Annelise Kyriakou, Dr Melissa Lai, Professor Michael David

Metro North facility: Caboolture and Kilcoy Hospitals, Woodford Corrections

There is an urgent need to identify aspiration (when food/fluids enter the airway due to impaired swallowing) earlier to prevent acute and chronic lung disease in children. In <5 years, our multidisciplinary research collaborative of clinicians and academics across multiple health services and universities utilized advancements in modern machine learning techniques of "deep learning" to develop world-first algorithms that automatically detect swallowing sounds and diagnose aspiration in pre-terms, infants and children. A patent protection application has been submitted, acknowledging co-invention across MNH and Griffith University.

The algorithms will be used to develop a digital app that will have the capability to accurately diagnose aspiration and eliminate the need for exposure to radiation via a videofluoroscopic swallow study, the current gold-standard in infants and children. This discovery will significantly improve identification and management of aspiration by (i) allowing caregivers to assess feeding in the home environment, (ii) allowing regional and remote families the opportunity for evaluation (iii) increased test repeatability to optimise and adapt treatment plans; (iv) building the clinical capacity of other health professionals (e.g. nurses) who can use the digital app to assess for aspiration when access to paediatric speech pathologists are limited (e.g. RBWH neonatal unit). This simple yet accurate and accessible tool will significantly reduce the incidence of acute and chronic lung disease, thereby reducing a significant health burden for families, improve child quality of life (social burden) and prevent avoidable hospital admissions (economic burden).

Finalists

- Spider venom peptides: precision therapy for genetic epilepsy
- Allogeneic T cell therapy for SARS-CoV-2

Clinical Research Award

Winner: Securing jugular central venous catheters with dressings fixed to a novel liquid adhesive in an Intensive Care Unit population: The STICKY Study

Team Members: Professor Nicole Marsh, Dr Amanda Corley, Catherine O'Brien, Emily Larsen, Associate Professor Evan Alexandrou, Dr Patrick Harris, Professor Kevin Laupland, Professor Robert Ware

Metro North facility: Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital

Patients in acute tertiary facilities such as the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital are highly dependent on invasive devices, such as Vascular Access, to receive life-saving treatment. These devices are held in place with a range of adhesives and securements, which often deteriorate over time. As these adhesives lift from the skin, they expose the patient to both risk of accidental device removal, and infection, significantly increasing a persons' risk of morbidity and mortality. Central Venous Catheters (CVCs) are one such device, for which failure exposes patients to severe potential harm. Globally, millions of CVCs are inserted in Intensive Care Units (ICU) every year and approximately one-in-four will fail prematurely due to infection and non-infectious complications, often because of failing securement. To address this, a novel medical liquid adhesive (MLA) was developed to aid in dressing adhesion and prevent deterioration over time, particularly in CVCs

placed in the jugular vein. Noting a significant potential for the use of this novel product within ICUs across Metro North Health and Australia, the project team planned and successfully executed a multi-site superiority randomised controlled trial ('STICKY Trial') comparing MLA with standard care, conducted across four metropolitan ICUs in Australia (RBWH, TPCH, Logan Hospital, and Liverpool Hospital (NSW)) to test its efficacy in preventing dressing failure among this extremely vulnerable population. In total, 160 participants were included (September 2021 - February 2023), and the results demonstrated a significant reduction in CVC dressing failure associated with MLA use (Odds Ratio 0.39; 95% Confidence Interval, 0.20-0.76).

Finalists

- Perioperative Patient Blood Management - "Saving lives, saving blood, saving precious resources and improving patient outcomes"
- RBWH Burns MDT Program of Research

Partnering with Consumers Award

Winner: Consumers in Research, Redcliffe Hospital

Team Members: Jane Geltch, Associate Professor Joel Dulhunty, Associate Professor Amanda Fox, Fiona Malcolm, Dr Jacqui Peet

Metro North facility: Redcliffe Hospital

This nomination recognises extensive consumer and clinician-researcher co-design and capacity building at the highest levels of consumer engagement (leadership and partnership), impacting multiple aspects of research strategic planning, design, delivery, quality improvement and research support functions, including funding decisions, fundraising and research education and training, at Redcliffe Hospital and more broadly in Metro North Health. This work has been undertaken by multiple individuals (consumers, clinicians and academic partners) with standout leadership by Jane Geltch as the consumer researcher/co-design lead for Redcliffe Hospital.

Finalists

- Scott Harding
- Co-designing The Healthy Gut Diet: A partnership with lived experience experts

Research Support Award

Winner: Integrated CAncer REsearch (I-CARE) Collaborative - Clinical Trials

Team Members: Amy Ives, Jacqui Keller, Robyn Western, Associate Professor Melissa Eastgate, Michael Smith, Cameron Curley, Associate Professor David Wyld, Dr Penny Mackenzie

Metro North facility: Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital

The Integrated CAncer REsearch (I-CARE) Collaborative in Cancer Care Services (CCS)

supports a wide variety of oncology and haematology research at the RBWH, TPCH and North Lakes facilities. I-CARE are a dedicated multidisciplinary team of administrative, nursing, and allied health professionals who are passionate about our work, with 36 full time equivalent staff. With extensive experience in oncology research management, the team supports a broad portfolio of clinical trials, including investigator-initiated, collaborative group and industry sponsored studies and works collaboratively across disciplines to improve processes and streamline research support.

I-CARE provides and facilitates operational research functions across MNH, as well as leading innovation in developing partnerships within MNH and with external providers. The team delivers education and guidance to medical, nursing, and allied health professionals engaged in clinical research. Furthermore, we provide trial design consultation and mentorship services, with a particular focus on supporting early-career investigators.

Finalists

- TPCH Allied Health Research Collaborative
- Redcliffe Intensive Care Follow-up Clinic

Rising Star Award

Winner: Dr Samantha Bunzli, Conjoint Senior Research Fellow, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital

One in five adults experience joint pain (most commonly back pain and osteoarthritis). Inequity, disability and distress are fuelled by outdated beliefs that joint pain is inevitable, will get worse with age and can only be fixed by surgery. Urgent action is needed to change how society thinks, talks about and treats these conditions. Widespread narrative change will empower people around the world to live well with joint pain and ease burden on health services. At the forefront of global action to change the narrative, my research has impacted health policy and practice to drive high-quality, equitable care for people with joint pain

This program of research embedded in the RBWH physiotherapy department, has developed consumer-engaged approaches, integrated Western and Indigenous methodologies, and applied knowledge translation frameworks to promote high-quality, equitable care for joint pain in my department, across the state-wide Queensland Musculoskeletal Pain Screening Clinics, and nation-wide.

The flagship studies revealed that the dominant medical narrative around joint pain fuels fear, healthcare dependency and disproportionately impacts minoritized populations. Samantha developed communication frameworks to shift the narrative and empower people with joint pain to live well. In partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, She co-designed the first clinically-and culturally-informed resources to shift the joint pain narrative (stayingstrongwitharthritis.org.au). These frameworks and resources are embedded into the 2024 Clinical Care Standards for Knee Osteoarthritis, guiding practice across all national health services.

Finalists

- Dr Natasha Roberts

- Dr Sarah Andersen

Researcher of the Year Award

Winner: Professor Pamela Ann McCombe, Senior Staff Specialist Neurology, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital

Professor Pamela McCombe is an internationally renowned neurologist who is one of the most published, cited and granted researchers within Metro North. She is in the top 2% of most cited scientists globally (Scopus). She has quietly contributed to an extraordinary body of new knowledge; has inspired countless junior clinicians to embark on clinician-scientist careers; and has embedded research into multiple neurology clinics at RBWH. Her outstanding contributions are evidenced by being awarded the highly prestigious Medal of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians in 2024; medal from the Australian and New Zealand Association of Neurologists (ANZAN) (2015) and MJ Eadie Prize for Neuroscience Research (2012). She is the pioneer of clinical neuroimmunology in Australia and has long been an advocate for sex-differences in neurological disorders, trailblazing this in multiple sclerosis (MS) care. She was invited to present her outstanding work as the EG Robertson lecture at ANZAN (2023) and the Eccles lecture at the Australian Neurosciences Society (2019).

She has created a sustainable program at Metro North, an example being mentorship of A/Prof Robert Henderson during his PhD studies, with whom she established Motor Neurone disease (MND) and neuromuscular clinics at RBWH. At RBWH she has also established research capability at the MS clinic, with contribution to International BigData studies, immunological studies, and studies of MS in pregnancy.

She embodies the true definition of an active clinician scientist, and her love of mentoring has enabled her to guide the careers of the next generation of clinician-researchers.

Finalists

- Professor Claire Rickard
- Professor Kevin Laupland

Regards,
Liz and Steven

Metro North Health

We uphold our commitment to health equity through our Values in Action
Respect | Integrity | Compassion | High Performance | Teamwork

Metro North Health acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the Land upon
which we live, work and walk, and pay our respects to Elders both past and present.

Metro North Health's vision
Creating healthier futures together—where
innovation and research meets compassionate
care and community voices shape our services.

Queensland
Government