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West Australian News

At the beginning of the year, the WA branch of the ASM welcomed two new student members to the committee. Peter Hutton is the new student representative for the University of Western Australia and is currently undertaking a PhD through the School of Animal Biology. Peter began his PhD in 2004 after completing a Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Science. Originally a manager of a dairy farm in country NSW, Peter's interest in this industry, especially the challenges of competition of high production in a global environment has directed him to his current work. The focus of Peter's PhD is the investigation of Australian plants for their antimicrobial properties as a way of positively manipulating rumen fermentation and replacing the existing use of antibiotics as growth promoters. The new student representative for Murdoch University is Rajat Hans. Rajat is an international student from India studying in his final year of the Bachelor of Science in Molecular Biology degree. Tessa Vanzetti continues from last year as the student representative for Curtin University. Tessa is currently in her final year of her Bachelor of Medical Science degree with interests in microbiology, haematology, molecular biology and immunology.

Recipients of awards received last year from the ASM for WA students include Jenefer Hole, the Becton-Dickinson Travel Award and Tessa Vanzetti, the Summer Vacation Scholarship. Branch travel awards are offered each year for students of microbiology to attend the ASM national conference. Last year's winner, Jenefer Hole, presented work from her PhD entitled Modulatory Effects of Bacterial Thiol-Activated Lysins and DNA on Respiratory Epithelial Cell Function. Travel awards to attend the national conference are offered nationally.

The Western Australian branch of the ASM also offers, each year, a summer vacation scholarship for students of microbiology. Undergraduate students are encouraged to apply for the scholarship where they undertake a 6-8 week research project through an institution and supervisor of their choice. Scholarships are valued at \$200 per week during the summer vacation. Last year's recipient, Tessa Vanzetti, conducted research on Molecular Analyses of Viral Interference by HCV in Interferon-alpha Mediated Jak-STAT Signalling with Dr. Mark Watson at Royal Perth Hospital.

A report on her research follows below

Summer Vacation Scholarships will again be awarded this year through the WA branch and undergraduate microbiology

students are encouraged to apply. Closing dates for the scholarships are toward the end of year, so check the branch newsletter for details.

Vacation scholarship report – Tessa Vanzetti

HCV genotype-1 protein modulation of the Jak-STAT pathway

The current treatment for Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is interferon- α (IFN- α) and ribavirin. This increases the patient's immune response against the virus, though the exact mode of action is still not clear. Some patients do not respond well to IFN- α , particularly patients with HCV genotype 1. This fact led to the hypothesis that there may be viral factors that could disrupt normal interferon signaling and, as such, suppress the normal interferon induced antiviral response.

IFN- α is produced by many cells in response to viral infection. When it binds to its receptor, it causes a signaling cascade of events resulting in the specific induction of greater than 30 gene products that control viral infection. One of the immune mechanisms activated is the Jak-STAT pathway, it is an important response pathway to IFN- α/β . HCV is a known inhibitor of the Jak-STAT pathway.

A reporter vector was developed by Scott Fisher (PhD student, Microbiology UWA)



where an interferon stimulated response element (ISRE) was cloned upstream of the green fluorescent protein (GFP). ISREs are DNA sequences that sequester transcription factors induced by type I IFNs. Thus, when this reporter is transfected into mammalian cells and IFN is added to the cells they produce GFP. This protein is detected using flow cytometry. Thus, any inhibition of the signaling system will result in less or no GFP production.

Bacterial recombinant plasmids for use as mammalian expression vectors had been previously produced that covered the entire HCV protein set. These were then transfected into several mammalian cell lines along with the GFP reporter plasmid. Cells remained unstimulated or were stimulated by IFN- α and fluorescence determined by flow cytometry. The research is continuing in Dr Watson's laboratory.

The project was performed at the Department of Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, Royal Perth Hospital under the supervision of Dr Mark Watson. The duration of the project was six weeks where I gained many valuable skills and experience in molecular biology. I am now confident in performing plasmid preparation, cell culture, SDS-PAGE and Western Blotting. This experience has provided me with an exceptional head start in Medical Biotechnology, one of the third year units that I am studying in Medical Science at Curtin University of Technology. With my experience only in diagnostic microbiology laboratories it was an excellent insight of what it is like to work in a research laboratory. I am very grateful that I was given this opportunity.

Tessa Vanzetti was the recipient of the Vacation Scholarship offered by the Western Australia Branch of The Australian Society for Microbiology. Scholarships are awarded to a microbiology student who wishes to undertake a six to eight week research project during the summer vacation. For more details on this and other awards offered visit the Western Australian Branch website. Ed.

Call for nominations Vice-President Corporate Affairs

The Vice-President Corporate Affairs has an important role in overseeing the management of the Society's finances, although all accounts are kept by the National Office. The constitution provides that the Vice President, Corporate Affairs, shall hold office for a period of one year and may then be re-appointed to office by the Council for a period of not more than five years. After four years in office, the present incumbent Mr Geoff Coombs has submitted his resignation as Vice-President Corporate Affairs, effective from the Annual General Meeting, which will be held 27 September 2005.

Candidates for election to the position of Vice-President Corporate Affairs shall be Honorary Life Members, Financial Fellows, Members or Senior Associate Members of the ASM and be proposed and seconded by Honorary Life Members, Financial Fellows, Members or Senior Associate Members of the Society. Nominations must have the written consent of the candidate.

Nominations must be received by the ASM Office Manager before 5:00pm on Thursday 30 June 2005. Please use the 'Nomination for the position of Vice-President Corporate Affairs' form, which is set out below. The form can also be obtained from the National Office by emailing Chris Daly at chris@theasm.com.au

Nomination for the position of Vice-President Corporate Affairs of the Australian Society for Microbiology Inc.

We the undersigned wish to nominate _____
of _____

for the position of Vice-President Corporate Affairs of the Australian Society for Microbiology Inc.

Proposer (FASM / MASM / SASM / Honorary Life Member)

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Seconded (FASM / MASM / SASM / Honorary Life Member)

Name: _____ Signature: _____

I accept this nomination for the position of Vice-President Corporate Affairs of the Australian Society for Microbiology Inc.

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

Address your envelope as follows:

The Manager, ASM Inc
Unit 23, 20 Commercial Road
Melbourne VIC 3004

**Alternatively you may fax your nomination form to the National Office
on (03) 9867 8722**



Standing Committee on clinical microbiology

The new committee has settled in well and some important issues have been dealt with.

The document 'Guidelines for Assuring Quality of Solid Media used in Australia for the Cultivation of medically important Mycobacteria', produced by two ASM special interest groups (Mycobacteria and Culture Media), was formally adopted by the ASM at the National Council meeting on 31 March, 2005. Congratulations to these two special interest groups. The document is available on the ASM web site.

Geoff Coombs, currently vice president of Corporate Affairs at ASM, has been appointed as ASM representative on the Medical Testing Accreditation Advisory Committee of the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA). Geoff has also been coopted to the ASM Standing Committee on Clinical Microbiology. He will be in a valuable position to report to ASM on NATA activities. Congratulations Geoff!

NATA requested ASM to provide an opinion and recommendation on the use of the 'Roche Cobas Amplicor PCR System' (Roche PCR) for diagnosing infections due to *Chlamydia trachomatis* and / or *Neisseria gonorrhoea*.

Several members of the committee independently reviewed the evidence in the published literature about which specimen types were suitable for use in this assay. Currently, only endocervical and urethral swabs and first void urines are acceptable as specimens. However, many other types of specimens turn up in the diagnostic molecular microbiology laboratory. Should they be accepted or rejected? The members' comments were collated and a report sent to NATA, on behalf of ASM, which is printed here.

Report

The use of the Roche Cobas Amplicor PCR System to detect DNA from *Chlamydia trachomatis* and *Neisseria gonorrhoea* in certain human diagnostic specimens.

Recommendations of the Standing Committee on Clinical Microbiology of the Australian Society for Microbiology.

Chair: Dr Stephen Graves

Date: April 2005

The Roche Cobas Amplicor PCR System (hereinafter referred to as 'Roche PCR') detects DNA from *C. trachomatis* and *N. gonorrhoea*. It is widely used in



Dr Stephen Graves

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ASM Standing Committee on
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Tel: (02) 4921 4420
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Australian medical microbiology diagnostic laboratories.

The specimens for which it is routinely used, as a result of the manufacturers recommendations (following validation by the FDA in the USA), are:

- First void urines
- Endocervical swabs
- Urethral swabs

Many laboratories are also using 'Roche PCR' to detect DNA of *C. trachomatis* and *N. gonorrhoea* in other types of human specimens which have not been 'approved' by the manufacturer or any regulatory authority in Australia or overseas.

Nevertheless, such use is widespread because there is a demand for it and it seems to work. Should this practice be condoned or prohibited? The ASM Committee has looked at the published information on this topic and makes the following recommendations:

1. 'Roche PCR' may be used to detect *C. trachomatis* in the following specimens:

- Eye swabs
- Throat swabs
- Nasopharyngeal swabs (or aspirates)
- Vaginal swabs
- Vaginal tampons
- Semen
- Rectal swabs

as well as the already approved first void urines, urethral and endocervical swabs.

'Roche PCR' should NOT be used to detect *N. gonorrhoea* in any specimen other than:

- First void urines, urethral and endocervical swabs (for which it is already approved).

Specifically, the following specimens should NOT be used to detect *N. gonorrhoea* by 'Roche PCR':

- Eye swabs
- Throat swabs
- Nasopharyngeal swabs (or aspirates)
- Vaginal swabs
- Vaginal tampons
- Semen
- Rectal swabs

For these specimens, the detection of *N. gonorrhoea* should be by culture.

The evidence indicates that the 'Roche PCR' lacks specificity when detecting *N. gonorrhoea* and its use in these (non recommended) specimens cannot be approved. Vaginal swabs are not recommended as, in addition to poor specificity, poor sensitivity is also likely. Endocervical or urethral swab examined by culture is the recommended method for detecting *N. gonorrhoea*.

3. For all forensic specimens a second specimen should be obtained if possible and the result confirmed, whether by 'Roche PCR' (for *C. trachomatis*) or culture (for *N. gonorrhoea*).

4. When reporting *C. trachomatis* from a specimen site listed in 1. above, a comment (as under, or similar) should be added to the report. 'Although the laboratory is confident of this result, the testing method used is not validated for patient specimens from this site'.



I have attended my first meeting of the 'Pathology Associations' on behalf of ASM in Sydney in May 2005.

This group of organisations has interests in diagnostic laboratory pathology and consists of representatives of:

- The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (at whose headquarters the meeting was held)
- The Australian Society for Microbiology
- The Australasian Association of Clinical Biochemists
- The Australian Association of Pathology Practices (representing private pathology laboratories)
- The Australian Institute of Medical Scientists
- The Australian and New Zealand Society of Blood Transfusion

- The Human Genetics Society of Australia
- The National Coalition of Public Pathology (representing Public Pathology Laboratories)
- RCPA QAP Pty Ltd

This meeting is held every 6 months in Sydney and allows all the above bodies to get together to 'compare notes' and identify areas of common interest and possible concerns. Issues that are active include:

- Preparing for the 2006 Pathology Week (8-12 March, 2006) in Sydney
- Pathology Workforce Issues (pathologists, scientists, technicians) and education (including continuing education) of these groups
- The Therapeutics Goods Administration (TGA) and their plans to regulate all in vitro diagnostic devices

(IVD) including, pathology diagnostic kits, in Australia. This issue has the potential to deprive Australia of many imported kits and stop labs developing their own 'inhouse' assays. The cost of complying with the proposed regulations is out of all proportion to any benefits likely to be achieved.

- Monitoring of diagnostic laboratories by NATA and how to minimise variability between NATA accessors.

If any ASM member has professional issues that impact on the whole field of medical diagnostic testing (ie, involving organisations other than just ASM) they are welcome to advise me so I can be briefed and the matter placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

Call for Nominations President-Elect

Assoc Prof David Ellis' term as Immediate Past President concludes at the Annual General Meeting, which will be held 27 September 2005. In accordance with the ASM Constitution, nominations are invited for the position of President-Elect of the Society, to take office in September, 2005 following the Annual General Meeting. The President-Elect will hold office until the next Annual General Meeting, to be held in July, 2006, at the conclusion of which he or she will become President.

Candidates for election to the position of President-Elect shall be Honorary Life Members, Financial Fellows, Members or Senior Associate Members of the ASM and be proposed and seconded by Honorary Life Members, Financial Fellows, Members or Senior Associate Members of the Society. Nominations must have the written consent of the candidate.

Nominations must be received by the ASM Office Manager before 5:00pm on Thursday 30 June 2005. Please use the 'Nomination for the position of President-Elect' form, which is set out below. The form can also be obtained from the National Office by emailing Chris Daly at chris@theasm.com.au

Nomination for the position of President-Elect of the Australian Society for Microbiology Inc.

We, the undersigned, wish to nominate _____
of _____

for the position of President-Elect of the Australian Society for Microbiology Inc.

Proposer (FASM / MASM / SASM / Honorary Life Member)

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Seconded (FASM / MASM / SASM / Honorary Life Member)

Name: _____ Signature: _____

I accept this nomination for the position of President-Elect of the Australian Society for Microbiology Inc.

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

Address your envelope as follows:

**The Manager, ASM Inc
Unit 23, 20 Commercial Road
Melbourne VIC 3004**

Alternatively, you may fax your nomination form to the National Office on (03) 9867 8722



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Rapid Methods

Vacant

Students

Vacant

Division 4

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Meetings

Contributions listing relevant meetings are welcome. Please send to: <editor@theasm.com.au>

2005

26 June to 1 July 2005

Cairns, Australia

International Wildlife Disease Association Conference,

'Wildlife Health in a Shrinking World: Ecology, Management and Conservation' The International Wildlife Disease Association Conference will be held in Australia for the first time since 1981!

Pathology Conference

The Australian Society for Veterinary Pathology annual conference will be held in Cairns the preceding weekend, to enable attendance at both meetings.

Information

Details on the conference including registration forms and format for abstracts are available at <http://www.rainforest-crc.jcu.edu.au/events/conferences.htm>

8-9 July

Mirambeena Resort, Darwin

2005 TriState

Chair: Andrew Lawrence

Conference Manager:

Janette Sofronidis

Australian Society for Microbiology

E-mail: janette@theasm.com.au

Website: www.tristate2005.org

17-20 July

Hotel Watermark, Gold Coast

4th IWA Activated Sludge Population Dynamics Specialist Conference – Microbial Population Dynamics in Biological Wastewater Treatment

Chair: Linda Blackall

E-mail: aspd4@uq.edu.au

Web: www.awmc.uq.edu.au/aspd4

29-30 July

**Hamilton Island
Great Barrier Reef**

2nd Mycology MasterClass 2005

Following the success of the inaugural 2003 Mycology MasterClass, also held on Hamilton Island.

Places strictly limited.

Head of Faculty: David Ellis

Conference Manager

Janette Sofronidis

Australian Society for Microbiology

E-mail: janette@theasm.com.au

Website: www.2005mycology-masterclass.org

2-5 August

Hilton Adelaide, South Australia

National Serology Reference

Laboratory, Australia

22nd NRL Workshop on Serology

2nd announcement, program, registration and accommodation details available April 2005

Workshop Secretariat: Linda Tracey

National Serology Reference Laboratory

Australia, 4th Floor

Healy Building

41 Victoria Parade

Fitzroy Vic 3065

Tel: (03) 9418 1117

Fax: (03) 9418 1155

E-mail: linda@nrl.gov.au

Web: www.nrl.gov.au

20-24 August

Melbourne Convention Centre

7th World Congress on

Inflammation 2005

www.inflammation2005.com.

EarlyBird Registration Deadline: 20th

June, 2005

Contact:

Madeleine Cullity

Congress Manager

ICMS Pty Ltd

84 Queensbridge Street

Southbank VIC 3006

Phone: +61 3 9682 0244

Facsimile: +61 3 9682 0288

<http://www.icms.com.au/>

August 24-27 2005

Hobart, Australia

17th Annual Conference of the

Australasian Society for HIV Medicine (ASHM)

The ASHM Conference is Australasia's premier HIV conference and brings together the range of disciplines including basic science, clinical medicine, epidemiology and prevention, nursing and allied health, public health, social research, education, policy, community

programs and primary care, involved in HIV and hepatitis management.

The 2005 ASHM Conference will be run back-to-back with the Australasian Sexual Health Conference 2005, which represents an excellent opportunity for delegates to attend both conferences.

Summary of Deadlines:

30 June 2005 - Earlybird Registration

Deadline (CLOSING SOON)

21 July 2005 - Accommodation Booking

Deadline

11 August 2005 - Registration Deadline

For further information on both the ASHM & Sexual Health Conferences visit www.ashm.org.au/conference2005; or contact conferenceinfo@ashm.org.au or call 02 8204 0774.

22-24 August

Hobart

2005 Sexual Health Conference

Information: Nicole Robertson, as above

4-8 September

Surfers Paradise Marriott Resort

13th International Workshop on Campylobacter, Helicobacter and Related Organisms "CHRO" '05

Web: www.chro2005.com

25-29 September 2005

**National Convention Centre,
Canberra**

2005 Annual Conference of the Australian Society for Microbiology

Chair: George McLean

Conference Manager: Janette Sofronidis

Australian Society for Microbiology

E-mail: janette@theasm.com.au

Website: www.asm2005.org



Meetings continued

Contributions listing relevant meetings are welcome. Please send to: <editor@theasm.com.au>

14-16 November
Chiang Mai, Thailand

International Leptospirosis Society
4th Scientific Meeting

Web: www.ils2005.org

2006

2-6 July
Gold Coast Convention & Exhibition
Centre, Gold Coast

ASM 2006, Gold Coast

Annual Scientific Meeting & Exhibition
for the Australian Society for
Microbiology

Chair: Phil Giffard

Conference Manager:

Janette Sofronidis

Australian Society for Microbiology

E-mail: janette@theasm.com.au

10-15 September
Cairns Convention Centre,
Cairns Qld

IPNC 2006 – 15th International
Pathogenic Neisseria Conference '06

Co-convenors:

John Davies & Michael Jennings

Conference Manager: Janette Sofronidis

Australian Society for Microbiology

E-mail: janette@theasm.com.au

Website: www.ipnc2006.org

15-18 October
Amsterdam, Netherlands

6th International Conference of the
Hospital Infection Society

Contact: Congress Secretariat

HIS 2006, Concorde Services Ltd

4B/50 Spiers Wharf, Glasgow G4 9TB

Tel: (44) 141 331 0123

Fax: (44) 141 331 0234

E-mail: info@his2006.com

Web: www.his2006.com

29 October–1 November
Crown Promenade Hotel,
Melbourne

VTEC 2006

The 6th International Symposium
on Shiga Toxin (Verocytotoxin)
producing Escherichia coli
infections

Chair: Elizabeth Hartland

Conference Manager: Janette Sofronidis

Australian Society for Microbiology

E-mail: janette@theasm.com.au

Website: www.vtec2006.org

New Guidelines Released

The Culture Media and the Mycobacteria Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are pleased to announce the release of the completed and approved version of their latest document

'Guidelines for Assuring Quality of Solid Media used in Australia for the Cultivation of Medically Important Mycobacteria'

The Guidelines have gone through extensive preparation, including local, national and international review; endorsed by the ASM Standing Committee on Clinical Microbiology, their endorsement has now been ratified by ASM National Council.

The document will be available for download from the ASM website, or by email as below.

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