

Dear All,

Welcome to our inaugural end of year newsletter! 2008 has been an incredibly busy and exciting time at ParkC. I hope this newsletter will keep you up to date with all that we have been doing.

But first I want to thank each and every one of you. Without your involvement, support and encouragement ParkC would not be what it is.

Meghan Thomas
(ParkC Founder and Co-ordinator)

Introducing the new team members

Dr Kate Cruise joined ParkC in March of this year, and has quickly become indispensable! In 2007 Kate completed her PhD in Tasmania looking at the way the brain responds to emotional stimuli. Kate is responsible for co-ordinating the cognition arm of ParkC's research program and overseeing the exercise program. On top of all of this Kate has a deep passion for dogs and spends most of her spare time with her furry friends. After travelling across the Nullarbor in a van with their 2 dogs, Kate and her husband are settling into Perth.



Mr Roger Pegoraro became involved with ParkC in July and now runs the ParkC exercise program. In a past life, Roger was a trainer at a local gym and has extensive experience in designing exercise programs for normal individuals and those with chronic illnesses. He is now focused on finishing his Master of Science degree in exercise physiology looking at what causes muscle cramps. Roger enjoys competing in triathlons as well as in pure swimming, cycling and running events. In his spare time Roger is either eating or asleep.

ParkC Research - Laboratory

Substantial progress has been made within the laboratory. Dr Thomas was invited to, and now leads, the laboratory research program for the Surgical NeuroDiscovery Research Group (Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital; www.neurofinity.org). This affiliation will ensure that ParkC research is focused on translating laboratory research into a clinic setting.

Jessica Gell from Bath University (UK) has arrived in Perth. Jessica is spending a year working with us in the laboratory. She has settled in well and is already a confident researcher. Jessica is looking at what genetic changes occur in an animal model of

Parkinson's. Other laboratory work is focused on determining whether a specific gene protects dopaminergic neurons from dying.

ParkC Research - Cognition

It has been proposed by Dr Roger Barker and his team at Cambridge University, UK that there are two subtypes of Parkinson's. Type 1 is a relatively benign form that appears to be restricted to the degeneration of a specific cell population in the substantia nigra while the second type appears to reflect a more globe degeneration. Establishing these two types will have important implications for the management of the condition as well as aiding the selection of participants for clinical trials. At ParkC we are aiming to replicate Dr Roger Barker's findings and to see whether the same two subtypes can be identified in a sample of Perth people with Parkinson's.

Many of you have already been involved in this research. In fact, Dr Kate Cruise has responded to over 90 enquiries over the course of 3 months and has tested over 50 people, with each testing session taking around 2 hrs. This study needs to re-test people every year - so plenty of hard work to come!

Meghan and Kate have established a collaboration with Dr Natalie Gasson (Curtin University of Technology and a board member of Parkinson's WA). Natalie has extensive experience in cognitive testing of people with Parkinson's and her involvement will greatly strengthen and enhance this research. ParkC has also formed collaborations with Drs Romola Bucks and Andrea Loftus (University of Western Australia). Their combined expertise in ageing research, neurological conditions, and cognitive assessments has helped tremendously in the design of the cognition arm of ParkC's research and will prove to be an invaluable relationship for the course of the long term cognition study.

ParkC is also working closely with Parkinson's WA, whose support and suggestions have been invaluable to this research.

ParkC Research - Non-pharmacological intervention

ParkC is currently conducting a pilot 12 week exercise research program to see whether exercise can help to improve the physical functioning, muscle strength, balance and gait speed, and mental well being of people with Parkinson's. A novel aspect of this research will be to determine whether exercise can also help to improve thinking and memory.

Roger Pegoraro runs the exercise program and has had significant input into its design and selection of appropriate physiological and functional assessment measures. To-date he has performed baseline assessments of 37 people participating in the exercise research program. 20 of these people have already begun their 12 week exercise program and thanks to Anne Bordoni, this group is now known as the "Parkie Pumpers". The remaining 17 people are patiently waiting for 12 weeks before starting their program in early 2009.



Parkie Pumpers Competition:

Part of the baseline assessment for entry into the pilot 12 week exercise program is the person who, during the pre-intervention data collection, lifted the most weight on the lying leg press as percentage of their body weight.

And the winner is.. Tony Van Omme.

Tony lifted 118% of his body weight during the initial assessment.

*there will be another competition next year to see who has improved the most.

Fundraising and community events

1. **The Royal Freshwater Bay Yacht Club's (RFBYC) Melbourne Cup Luncheon** (4th November, 2008). We were successful in being nominated to receive the proceeds of this year's event. Don [a member of the Young Onset Group (YOGs)] is a keen yachtsman and member of the RFBYC and his daughter, Lisa, submitted a compelling application to the club. While the final numbers are still being calculated it is anticipated that at least \$10,000 was raised. Our thanks go to the RFBYC and the organising committee who did a fabulous job of staging this event.
2. **Dr Roger Barker and Dr Anna Goodman's visit** (20th - 27th November 2008). Multiple events were organised and promoted within the local community. On Saturday 22nd November, 300 people attend a seminar at ParkC where Dr Barker gave a wonderful and informative talk about the different subtypes of Parkinson's and the research that was being conducted at ParkC. Dr Barker also gave a presentation at Parkinson's WA, and an evening lecture for invited neurologists, geriatricians and scientists sponsored by the company Hospira. In addition the Young Onset Group (YOGs) hosted an afternoon tea for Dr Barker and raised money for the YOGS scholarship.
3. **A Current Affair**. The visit of Dr Barker was of interest to A Current Affair. The program focused on Tara (and her family) as someone who was diagnosed with Parkinson's at an early age. This segment went to air on the 28th November. It's so exciting to see Parkinson's get this level of exposure within the general community. Our appreciation goes to Tara and her family for having the courage to tell their story.
4. **YOG Scholarship**. The Young Onset Group (YOGs) is a vibrant support group for those people diagnosed with Parkinson's before age 55. They are deeply committed to supporting research and have established a Scholarship Fund that will go towards supporting a PhD student to work in research with Dr Meghan Thomas at ParkC. Since setting up the fund, the YOGs have raised over \$2,700.

More information and getting involved

For more information about the research at ParkC or to find out how to get involved with any of our research programs, please visit our website (www.ParkC.org.au), or call us on 6304 3560.