



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

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# Dent-AL

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER



Professor Mike Morgan

## Professor Morgan reappointed

We are delighted to inform our alumni and friends that Professor Mike Morgan has been reappointed for a second term as Head of the Melbourne Dental School.

Professor Morgan was first appointed as Head of School in 2015 and has been instrumental in laying the foundation for our continued pre-eminence. He has built a leadership team committed to innovative teaching and world-class research and has enhanced close working relationships with all partners, especially Dental Health Services Victoria. In 2015, he was also elected as President of the peak Australian accreditation authority, the Australian Dental Council.

Professor Morgan is a strong supporter of students and a driver of collaboration and research. He is committed to creating opportunities for dental education and research within the community and expanding possibilities for our students in teaching and research at the Melbourne Dental Clinic. He has also recently appointed a new CEO of the Dental Clinic to lead the next phase of its development.

**Congratulations Mike!**

## 20 years of Oral Health Therapy at Melbourne

This year marks 20 years since the University of Melbourne graduated its first cohort of oral health practitioners. Since then, the University has graduated nearly 350 students from the Diploma of Oral Health Therapy and Bachelor of Oral Health and we are pleased to invite all alumni of oral health to join us on campus at a free cocktail event to celebrate this milestone.

Reunions and celebrations such as this are a wonderful opportunity for alumni to re-connect with old friends, colleagues and teachers. It is also an opportunity for

the Melbourne Dental School to celebrate and recognise the achievements of the students, graduates, staff and volunteers who have contributed to the success of the oral health program at Melbourne over the past 20 years.

We are immensely proud that our oral health graduates are now located all over the world, working in a range of disciplines from public health, policy development, Indigenous health, emergency care, community health, private practice and many more. We look forward to seeing many of you again at this special event.

### Friday 25 August, 6:30pm

An optional tour of the Melbourne Dental School and Melbourne Dental Clinic will be held from 5.30pm

**University House at the Woodward  
Level 10, Melbourne Law School  
185 Pelham St  
Carlton 3052**

**Dress:** Smart casual

This is a free event for alumni

Please RSVP online by Friday 11 August 2017 at [alumni.online.unimelb.edu.au/oralhealth](http://alumni.online.unimelb.edu.au/oralhealth)



Yolngu dancers at the Garma Festival , East Arnhem Land

## Oral Health partnership in NT

By Associate Professor Julie Satur

In 2010, the mean number of decayed or missing teeth among Australia's Indigenous children was almost twice that for non-Indigenous children in all age groups. For those over 15 years of age, the decay rate is three times that of non-Indigenous people. This latter age group is also more than twice as likely to have advanced periodontal disease and five times more likely to have complete edentulism.

This has not always been the case.

Traditionally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had good oral health with attrition the most commonly seen dental condition. The introduction of fermentable carbohydrates and sugars into the Indigenous diet in the 19th and 20th centuries was the catalyst for a severe decline in oral health. Although at present a proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have good oral health, on average Indigenous people experience poor oral health earlier in their life and with greater severity and prevalence than the rest of the population.

For many Indigenous people, access to culturally appropriate and timely dental care is often not available. This is particularly true in the rural and remote regions where there is a shortage of dental practitioners and teams must either drive or be flown into remote communities or residents evacuated for emergency hospital-based care. The

effects of disadvantage are often multiplied by remoteness for the people of East Arnhem Land (EAL), who frequently speak several Yolngu languages before they learn English and experience challenges in maintaining food and water security.

In recognition of these challenges, the Melbourne Dental School (MDS) has developed a partnership with Miwatj Health, an Aboriginal community controlled health service based in Nhulunbuy, (EAL) in the Northern Territory as part of the University of Melbourne's collaboration with the Yothu Yindi Foundation. The partnership represents a formal commitment to recognition and respect for Yolngu learning and knowledge. The Miwatj-MDS partnership will focus on building community-led oral health projects, including services, oral health promotion and research arising from local needs. Importantly, the partnership aims to build the University's understanding of, and share in, Yolngu intellectual traditions through an agreed program of activities that span culture, leadership, education, health and research.

The Melbourne Dental School has contributed to a needs assessment and engagement work to underpin the Miwatj-MDS partnership including a scoping visit to Miwatj and EAL, attending the Garma Festival and hosting a visit to Melbourne by Dr Lucas De Toca, CMO of Miwatj.

In February 2017, staff of the Melbourne Dental School and the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences participated in an Oral Health Summit in Nhulunbuy, which had strong participation from the Commonwealth and Territory Governments, health service providers, the Homelands Corporations in EAL, and Miwatj Board members. The summit laid the groundwork for a regional Oral Health Plan to enable the partnership work to progress with local leadership.

In July and August of this year, after completion of cultural competence preparation, four Bachelor of Oral Health students will undertake placements hosted by Miwatj and Oral Health Services NT in Nhulunbuy. These students will pilot a range of models of care to inform the development of a larger-scale strategy potentially including an oral health and dentistry student placement program. In addition, the Melbourne Dental School will be contributing expertise to a range of public oral health projects in response to the identified needs of the region.

Given the challenges of reducing inequalities in oral health, it is expected that this project and the EAL Oral Health Plan will also bring to light further questions that will require additional research and evaluation, engaging the MDS and other parts of the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences over the next decade.

## World-first periodontitis vaccine

A world-first vaccine which could eliminate severe gum disease, or at least reduce the need for surgery and antibiotics, has been developed by scientists at the Oral Health CRC at the University of Melbourne with industry partner CSL.

The vaccine targets enzymes produced by the bacterium *Porphyromonas gingivalis*, to trigger an immune response. This response produces antibodies that neutralise the pathogen's destructive toxins.

CEO of the Oral Health CRC, Melbourne Laureate Professor Eric Reynolds AO, said it was hoped the vaccine would substantially reduce tissue destruction in patients harbouring *P. gingivalis*.

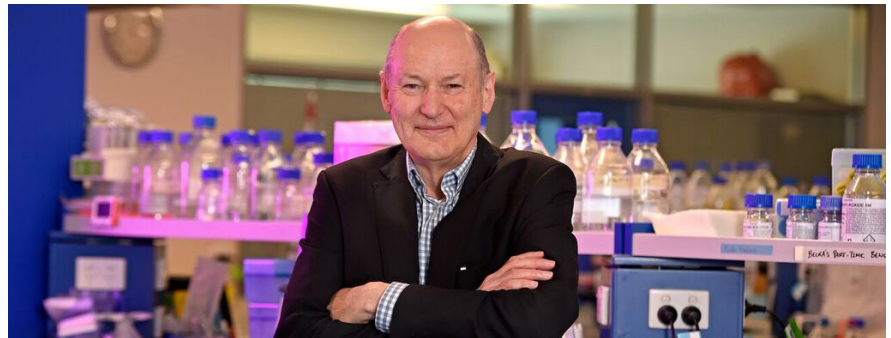
“Current treatments for periodontitis include professional cleaning and sometimes surgery and antibiotics. While these are helpful, in many cases the bacterium re-establishes in the dental plaque causing a microbiological imbalance so the disease continues.

*“Periodontitis is widespread and destructive. We hold high hopes for this vaccine to improve quality of life for millions of people,” said Professor Reynolds.*

Moderate to severe periodontitis affects one in three adults and more than 50 per cent of Australians over the age of 65. It is a chronic disease that destroys gum tissue and bone

supporting teeth, leading to tooth loss. It is also associated with diabetes, heart disease, rheumatoid arthritis, dementia and certain cancers.

The research findings were published in the journal *NPJ Vaccines* (part of the *Nature* series) in December 2016 and represent analysis of the vaccine's effectiveness by collaborating groups based in Melbourne and at Cambridge, USA. Clinical trials in patients with periodontitis could potentially begin in 2018.



Professor Eric Reynolds (Portrait by Jeff Crow – Courtesy of DHAA Ltd)

## A decade of rural dentistry mentoring in Swan Hill

For the last decade, Dr John Harrison has been mentoring graduates from Melbourne Dental School at his rural practice in Swan Hill, in northwest Victoria. Not just an advocate for the benefits of mentoring for new graduates, Dr Harrison believes he gets just as much as he gives from the experience. His reasons are two-fold: his mentee's passion for first-class dentistry is infectious, and the eager eyes of a graduate in the clinic mean that even after 30 years John remains engaged in the pursuit of excellence in his own practice.

“All of the recent graduates we have mentored at the practice have cultivated a highly stimulating environment that is a joy to work in,” says Dr Harrison. “They really want to do their very best and they keep me

on my toes because I have to justify the way I work and know that it stands up to scrutiny!”

*Under Dr Harrison's watchful eye his mentees can perfect their practice much more quickly than they would otherwise.*

Dr Rachael McDonald (BDS 2005) recalls that when she was being mentored by Dr Harrison at the Swan Hill Dental Group she felt confident to, “have a go at the more complex procedures and treatment plans due to the support and mentoring John gave me”.

Dr Harrison says that there is something particularly special about the Melbourne Dental School graduates he has mentored.

“They are all vitally interested in dentistry and all have been anxious to produce first class treatment outcomes for their patients. But if I had to put it down to one thing it is their attitude to the ‘business of dentistry’—maintaining the commercial side of running a practise while keeping patients' health as the topmost priority— that most impresses me” says Dr Harrison.

Ten Melbourne Dental School graduates have been fortunate to have been mentored by Dr Harrison at the Swan Hill Dental Group. Undoubtedly there will be many more whose practices will shape and be shaped by a mutual exchange of knowledge and passion for first-class dentistry.

## Queen's Honours congratulations

It is with great pride that we congratulate two of our esteemed alumni for the public service medals they were awarded in this year's Australia Day and Queen's Birthday Honours.

The work of our alumni is the manifestation of our goal to improve the health and wellbeing of all communities throughout the world and we congratulate Dr Alain G Middleton AO

and Dr Stuart B Gairns AM for this public recognition of their service.

**Dr Alain G Middleton AO (GDipForenOdon 1994)** is a global expert in victim identification. He was made an Officer of the Order of Australia for his service as a forensic odontologist and for his contributions to the development of international standards in disaster response.

**Dr Stuart B Gairns AM (MDS 1982)** was made a Member of the Order of Australia for his distinguished service to dentistry as a periodontist alongside his contribution to professional dental societies.



## Mentoring eases the transition to professional practice

“I’m both excited and a little fearful,” says final year dentistry student Kaya Kapusta (BBiomed2013) about her imminent transition to life as a dentist. “It will be exciting to be working, but I am also aware that I will face a very steep learning curve as I try to find my place within the dental profession after I graduate.”

The transition to professional practice can be daunting for recent graduates. It is well understood that many of the ‘soft skills’ of professional life like networking, goal setting and making connections with other professionals cannot be learnt in the classroom. It was with this in mind that the Melbourne Dental School launched a professional mentoring program in early 2017 with the support of a bequest from the Estate of the late Dr Peter Martin Johansen.

***Professor Mike Morgan, Head of the Melbourne Dental School believes that the mentoring program represents a natural progression in the schools’ efforts to deliver the highest quality teaching and learning.***

“A fully fledged mentoring program that pairs final year students with alumni in the profession is an holistic approach to education. It is also a rewarding opportunity for our alumni to remain connected with MDS and involved in our mission of educating the next generation of dental professionals.

“For both students and alumni this is an opportunity to shape the future of dental education at the University of Melbourne, as well as the future of our profession and our community,” says Professor Morgan.

Dr Jodie Dobson (BDSc1995) was excited to volunteer for the pilot mentoring program. It gave her the opportunity to become more connected with MDS and give back the gift of mentoring that she considers herself very lucky to have had working with her father for 20 years.

“When I was approached to mentor, I jumped at the opportunity. I have always wanted to give back to MDS since leaving in 1995. Being a mentor is a great opportunity to engage with current students and the University. I feel I’m looking back at myself 20 years ago!

“I’m really enjoying seeing the world from Kaya’s perspective. Already I have loved learning how the dental course operates today, and how her year is structured.

***“Mentoring allows me to spread my passion for dentistry and infect someone else with it. This one will be easy though, Kaya has already caught the bug!” says Dr Dobson.***

For Kaya, the MDS mentoring program provides an opportunity to explore areas that interest her such as the intricacies of running a private practice. She is also gaining crucial insight into what matters to her in an employer and workplace while observing how established dentists foster a fulfilling work/life balance.

From April through to November 2017, the 23 final year students participating in the MDS mentoring pilot (17 Doctor of Dental Science students and four Bachelor of Oral Health students) will meet with 23 volunteer alumni to informally discuss working in the dentistry profession and life after graduation. If the pilot is deemed a success, the program will be rolled out on a larger scale in the coming years.