



PathWay

THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PATHOLOGISTS OF AUSTRALASIA



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ISSUE #097

IN THIS ISSUE

- Severe labour shortage predicted within pathology profession
- International Pathology Day (IPD) 2019
- Let's talk about oral sex
- Do you know which test is named after Georgios Papanikolaou

INTERESTING FACTS

70%

the percentage of oropharyngeal cancers which are caused by HPV^[1]

1940

the decade the pap smear became the standard for cervical screening

2035

Australia is on track to eliminate cervical cancer by 2035^[2]

Source:

[1] https://www.cancer.org.au/content/pdf/News/MediaReleases/2018/World_Head_and_Neck_Cancer_Day_2018_FINAL_27J

Welcome to the November issue of ePathWay

ePathway is an e-magazine designed for anyone interested in their health and wellbeing and the integral role pathology plays in the diagnosis, treatment and management of diseases.

This month's issue of *ePathway* looks at the following:

- Severe labour shortage predicted within pathology profession
- International Pathology Day (IPD) 2019
- Let's talk about oral sex
- Do you know which test is named after Georgios Papanikolaou

This month saw the announcement of a new President for the RCPA. Dr Michael Dray steps into the role, replacing A/Prof Bruce Latham who has completed his 2-year tenure in the role. Dr Dray has held the position of Vice President of the RCPA for the past 2 years and prior to that, was Vice President New Zealand for 6 years.

Remember to follow us on [Facebook](#) (@TheRoyalCollegeofPathologistsOfAustralasia), Twitter (@PathologyRCPA) or on Instagram (@the_rcpa). CEO, Dr Debra Graves can be followed on Twitter too (@DebraJGraves).

Severe labour shortage predicted within pathology profession



[ul18.pdf](#)
 [2] <https://www.cancer.org.au/news/media-releases/australia-set-to-eliminate-cervical-cancer-by-2035.html>

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The most recent Pathology Workforce Study, conducted on behalf of the RCPA, forecasts a severe labour shortage within the profession. According to the report, unless trainee numbers are increased, there will likely be a continuing shortage of pathologists. We spoke to Associate Professor Bruce Latham, President of the RCPA, to understand more.

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International Pathology Day (IPD) 2019

To celebrate IPD 2019, the College hosted an event which had a focus on HPV related head and neck cancer. The event was attended by guest patients, Julie McCrossin AM, TV presenter and media personality and Archibald prize-winning artist Nicholas Harding who shared their personal stories with the disease.



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Let's talk about oral sex

In mid 2013, Julie McCrossin was diagnosed with what was classified at the time as stage 4 oropharyngeal cancer. She had cancer in her tonsils, the back of her tongue and the side of her throat. During a moving presentation at IPD Julie was vocal about the need to break down the stigma surrounding oral health, encouraging people to talk openly about normal sexual behaviour.



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Do you know which test is named after Georgios Papanikolaou?

Taking its name Georgios Papanikolaou, the pap smear is a procedure which tests for the presence of precancerous or cancerous cells on the cervix. This month, we look at the history of the test which quickly became the standard for cervical screening from the early 1940s and speak to Professor Annabelle Farnsworth to discover what progress Australia is making with cervical cancer.



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Severe labour shortage predicted within pathology profession



The most recent Pathology Workforce Study*, conducted on behalf of the RCPA, forecasts a severe labour shortage within the profession. The results of the study clearly indicate that the current and future demand for Australian Pathologists and Senior Scientists is higher than current supply levels, and that significant gaps are developing in the workforce. This analysis mirrors the findings from earlier studies undertaken in both Australia and New Zealand and Internationally. We spoke to Associate Professor Bruce Latham, President of the RCPA, to understand more.

“Pathology is the backbone of healthcare; therefore, it is essential that the high standards of the profession are maintained by ensuring that trained doctors are in the required roles. Unfortunately, the results of the most recent workforce study have confirmed our concerns that pathology is facing a severe shortage. This projection highlights the need to increase the numbers of new Trainees and Fellows in order to address the balance of the Australian Pathologist workforce supply and demand by 2030. This also accounts for the ageing workforce; which has significant implications with/for the retirement of a large proportion of pathologists in the next ten years,” said A/Prof Latham.

The RCPA consistently monitors the pathology workforce by discipline, in terms of the distribution by State and Territory; and also the senior scientist workforce, both within Australia and in New Zealand. Vacancy levels and reasons for vacancies are analysed and we are committed to gaining a greater understanding of the current market status, and future supply and demand.

Not only is pathology integral to the diagnosis of every cancer, it is the foundation for the clinical practice of medicine, paving the way to the appropriate diagnosis, management and treatment of diseases. For the recent Pathology Workforce study, modelling was undertaken for each discipline of Pathology as well as for Senior Scientists, in both Australia and New Zealand. Two growth drivers for the national Pathologist workforce were used and predicted a growth rate of between 3.4 and 3.8%.

The report has shown that there will likely be a continuing shortage of pathologists unless trainee numbers are increased. In Australia, to meet the projected service demand of the ageing population, and a growth rate of 3.8%, trainee commencements per annum needed to increase from 100 to 192 and new fellows to increase from 90 to 173 to balance supply and demand. In the base year of the workforce survey, there were a total of 1924 Fellows and an additional 574 Trainees over the 5-6 years of training.

New Zealand has a lower level of supply of Pathologists, at 61.4 per million population, compared to the national Australian supply of 78.4 per million population. This is lower than every State and Territory in Australia apart from the Northern Territory. The results of the projection modelling in New Zealand showed that there were an additional 14 -18 trainees needed for the total New Zealand Pathologist workforce.

“The RCPA is committed to the training and professional development of pathologists throughout Australasia. It is imperative that we increase the numbers of trainees and new fellows on an ongoing basis to meet increasing demand. We need to establish where additional trainees are most urgently needed, and whether the findings are consistent with local knowledge and labour market performance. The Commonwealth and State governments will be important stakeholders in the level of funding available for additional positions,” said A/Prof Latham.

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International Pathology Day (IPD) 2019



This year, International Pathology Day (IPD) took place on 13 November. This is an initiative launched by the RCPA in 2012 to raise awareness of pathology in the community. To celebrate, the College hosted an event at their headquarters in Surry Hills, with a focus on human papilloma virus (HPV)-related head and neck cancer. The event was attended by guest patients Julie McCrossin AM, TV presenter and media personality and Archibald prize-winning artist Nicholas Harding who shared their personal stories with the disease.

During the event, anatomical pathologist, A/Prof Ruta Gupta, staff specialist in the Department of Tissue Pathology and Diagnostic Oncology, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, and Prof Jonathan Clark AM, head and neck surgeon and Director of Head and Neck Research at the Sydney Head and Neck Cancer Institute at Chris O'Brien Lifehouse, shared their professional insights into the disease. National medical reporter for the ABC, Sophie Scott, returned for a third year to lead the event's discussions.

Speaking at the event, Associate Professor Ruta Gupta said,

“Head and neck cancers are very serious cancers but unfortunately are one of the most under-supported, under-researched and under-funded cancers worldwide. HPV-associated oropharyngeal cancers have about the same incidence as cervical cancers. However, currently there are no effective screening methods for the oropharynx cancer and it often presents with neck lump rather than symptoms related to the tonsil or tongue. Australia leads the world in HPV vaccination, and it was a Fellow of the RCPA who developed the vaccine. Since 2007, the vaccine has been part of the national immunisation programme for girls. In that time, the incidence of HPV infection of the cervix has gone down from nearly 23% to 1% in women. Since 2013, the vaccine has

also been rolled out to boys. We are set to get ahead of cervix cancer by 2035. It is too early to examine the effect of the vaccine on oropharynx cancer, but hopefully it will be similar, but perhaps at a later date.”

Commenting on the importance of the multi-disciplinary team, Professor Jonathan Clark said,

“When we choose which patients to operate on, we do it as a team. The speech pathologist, the radiation oncologist, the medical oncologist, the dietician and the surgeon will all decide together, and the pathologist is so critical in that team. Pathologists play a very key part, not only in the diagnosis but for me as a surgeon they play a vital role in the assessment of the tumour after it has been removed. Together, we look at the success of the operation in terms of the number of lymph nodes that have been removed, how many are involved, or whether there is extension of the tumour along the nerves or into blood vessels. We also assess the primary tumour in terms of its growth pattern and its margins.”

In October 2017, Nicholas Harding was diagnosed with cancer at the base of his tongue. With a good prognosis, he commenced seven weeks of treatment at Lifehouse, finishing after 35 sessions of radiation and seven doses of chemotherapy. On his last day of treatment, he took a selfie during one of his regular sorbolene soaks and later drew a self-portrait from it, for which he became a finalist for the Archibald prize in 2018. Speaking about his experience he said,

“I remember very vividly when my Doctor told me I’d never be the same afterwards, but I felt very able to trust the process because I could gauge the quality of the people looking after me. For me it started with a scratchy throat which went away, followed by bad breath, but my GP suggested it could be hay fever. When a lump suddenly appeared in my neck, I went to another GP who was immediately suspicious and sent me for a biopsy. Pathology was therefore the end of trying to work out what was wrong, and I thank the pathologists for their hard work.”

During the event, Associate Professor, Bruce Latham, President of the RCPA, said:

“There is an increasing trend amongst the general public, and also amongst our colleagues, to not understand that pathology is a medical specialty. IPD is an opportunity to remind our colleagues that when they send tissue to a laboratory, it is looked at by a medical specialist. It does not go into a machine which prints out the answer. As we’ve said often before, 70 per cent of medical diagnoses, and 100 percent of cancers diagnoses, rely on pathology. What we as pathologists do is really important in a multi-disciplinary team.”

To view a video of the IPD event, visit:

<https://www.rcpa.edu.au/Events/PathologyDay/Watch-The-RCPA-IPD9-Event-Feat-Julie-McCrossin>

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Let's talk about oral sex



HPV is the cause of around 70 percent of oropharyngeal cancers, which occur in the tonsils and base of the tongue, and is most commonly transmitted through oral sex. This month, the College spoke out about the need to break down the stigma surrounding oral sex during its annual International Pathology Day event.

During the event, which focused on HPV-related head and neck cancer, Julie McCrossin AM, TV presenter and media personality, shared her personal experience with the disease. In mid 2013, she was diagnosed with stage 4 oropharyngeal cancer. She had cancer in her tonsils, the back of her tongue and the side of her throat. She was successfully treated with 30 sessions of radiation and four sessions of chemotherapy. During her presentation Julie was vocal about the need to break down the stigma surrounding oral health, encouraging people to talk openly about normal sexual behaviour.

"There is a new epidemic of HPV-related oropharyngeal cancer in the throat, tonsils and back of tongue and we need to raise more awareness about this under-recognised disease. In 2013 I was successfully treated for what was classified as stage four throat cancer at the time, which was caused by the HPV virus. I had not smoked or drunk alcohol at all for over 30 years. About 80% of Australians have HPV at some time in their life, however, in most cases their immune system destroys it. Unfortunately, for a small number of people it causes cancer.

"The HPV vaccine for boys and girls will protect future generations, but most people over 30 missed out on the vaccine. In terms of oropharyngeal cancer, the virus is commonly transmitted through oral sex, we need to be able to talk openly about this, so that people understand the link to throat cancer. We also need to publicise the symptoms of throat

cancer: a persistent sore throat, earache, voice changes and lumps on the neck. Early treatment saves lives. It saved mine,” said Julie McCrossin.

Last year, it was estimated 700 Australians would be diagnosed with an oropharyngeal cancer, and around 490 of those cases will have been caused by HPV^[1]. It is estimated that at any given time 10% of men and 4% of women have oral HPV infection, although most of these are with low-risk types of HPV that do not cause cancer^[2].

Also speaking at the event, Associate Professor Ruta Gupta, staff specialist in the Department of Tissue Pathology and Diagnostic Oncology, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, said,

“We are seeing an epidemic of oropharyngeal cancer caused by HPV. Our hopes are that the HPV vaccine will have a preventive effect and will protect against oropharyngeal cancer in the future, and therefore strongly recommend the vaccination. In the meantime, however, it is important that the public, as well as the medical community, are aware of HPV-associated oropharynx cancer. This particular cancer often develops nearly 20-30 years after HPV infection, which means that most patients are 40-60 years old. The most common symptom is a swelling in the neck that persists beyond 2-3 weeks but, unlike Julie, some patients may not have any symptoms related to their throat or tonsils.

“The medical community should be alert about investigating persistent neck lumps in adults with fine needle aspiration cytology/biopsy to exclude metastases from oropharynx cancer. The doctors performing the biopsies should ensure that there is adequate sample to allow HPV-related testing as this is very important to establish the diagnosis of HPV associated oropharynx cancer.”

References:

[1] <http://polioeradication.org/who-we-are/our-mission/>

[2] <https://www.beyondfive.org.au/beyondfive/media/pdf/beyond-five-hpv-final-pdf-181016.pdf>

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Do you know which test is named after Georgios Papanikolaou?



The Pap smear, or Pap test, has commonly been used to screen for cervical cancer. This month we investigate the history of the test, which can be dated back to the 1940s, and speak to Professor Annabelle Farnsworth, professor of pathology, anatomical pathologist and specialist gynaecological histopathologist and cytopathologist, to discover where we are now.

Taking his name, Georgios Papanikolaou, the Pap smear is a procedure which tests for the presence of precancerous or cancerous cells in the cervix. It was in 1916 when Papanikolaou made his first steps in this area, when he discovered that the reproductive cycles of animals could be timed by examining smears of their vaginal secretions. This initial research, carried out on guinea pigs, was/went on to be published in the American Journal of Anatomy in 1917.

From 1920, Papanikolaou turned his attention to humans and he began taking similar scrapings from women. He soon began to notice that he could distinguish differences between the cytology of normal and malignant cells, although his presentation on the topic in 1928 was met with scepticism.

Undeterred, Papanikolaou continued with his work and in 1939 collaborated on a clinical study with gynaecologic pathologist Herbert F Traut, MD. Their aim was to determine the diagnostic potential of a vaginal smear and involved taking smears from various women, which Papanikolaou interpreted. Many asymptomatic cancer cases were discovered, therefore proving that normal and abnormal smears taken from the vagina and cervix could be viewed under the microscope and be correctly classified.

The vaginal smear went on to be called the Pap smear, after Papanicolaou, and quickly became the standard for cervical screening from the early 1940s. Due to its simplicity and low cost, the Pap smear was used widely and therefore resulted in a significant decline in the incidence of cervical cancer thanks to its ability to detect malignancies early.

In Australia, as of 1st December 2017, the Pap smear test was replaced with a new Cervical Screening Test. Whilst the Pap smear test looked for abnormal cells in the cervix, the Cervical Screening Test looks for human papilloma virus (HPV) infection. The new test for HPV can identify women who could be at risk of cervical cancer earlier than the Pap test.

Commenting on the success of the screening programme, Professor Annabelle Farnsworth said,

“We are continuing to make huge steps in our efforts against cervical cancer, not just in terms of screening but in our understanding of HPV. Australia has one of the best screening programs in the world and it has saved countless lives since its introduction. What made the programme so successful is the quality of our cytology, which has a great emphasis on quality control.

“It is predicted that with the current screening programme and the vaccination programme, we will be able to eliminate cervical cancer by 2035. We will probably be one of the first countries in the world to do that.”

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4613936/>

<https://www.healio.com/hematology-oncology/gynecologic-cancer/news/print/hemonc-today/%7B0cf77692-00ab-40ea-9085-eacc638a63cf%7D/george-nicholas-papanicolaou--1883-1962>

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Previous Editions

IN THIS ISSUE

- Polio: The Endgame
- Toads that can tell if you're pregnant: History of the pregnancy test
- The power of fine needle biopsy in the developing world
- Promoting pathology in developing communities

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- Promoting pathology in developing communities

2019

[088 - February 2019](#)

[091 - May 2019](#)

[094 - August 2019](#)

[089 - March 2019](#)

[092 - June 2019](#)

[095 - September 2019](#)

[090 - April 2019](#)

[093 - July 2019](#)

[096 - October 2019](#)

2018

[077 - February 2018](#)

[080 - May 2018](#)

[078 - March 2018](#)

[081 - June 2018](#)

[079 - April 2018](#)

[082 - July 2018](#)

[083 - August 2018](#)
[086 - November 2018](#)

2017

[066 - February 2017](#)
[069 - May 2017](#)
[072 - August 2017](#)
[075 - November 2017](#)

[084 - September 2018](#)
[087 - December 2018](#)

[067 - March 2017](#)
[070 - June 2017](#)
[073 - September 2017](#)
[076 - Dec 2017/Jan 2018](#)

[085 - October 2018](#)

[068 - April 2017](#)
[071 - July 2017](#)
[074 - October 2017](#)

2016

[055 - February 2016](#)
[058 - May 2016](#)
[061 - August 2016](#)
[064 - November 2016](#)

[056 - March 2016](#)
[059 - June 2016](#)
[062 - September 2016](#)
[065 - Dec 2016/Jan 2017](#)

[057 - April 2016](#)
[060 - July 2016](#)
[063 - October 2016](#)

2015

[044 - February 2015](#)
[047 - May 2015](#)
[050 - August 2015](#)
[053 - November 2015](#)

[045 - March 2015](#)
[048 - June 2015](#)
[051 - September 2015](#)
[054 - Dec 2015/Jan 2016](#)

[046 - April 2015](#)
[049 - July 2015](#)
[052 - October 2015](#)

2014

[033 - February 2014](#)
[036 - May 2014](#)
[039 - August 2014](#)
[042 - November 2014](#)

[034 - March 2014](#)
[037 - June 2014](#)
[040 - September 2014](#)
[043 - Dec 2014/Jan 2015](#)

[035 - April 2014](#)
[038 - July 2014](#)
[041 - October 2014](#)

2013

[022 - February 2013](#)
[025 - May 2013](#)
[028 - August 2013](#)
[031 - November 2013](#)

[023 - March 2013](#)
[026 - June 2013](#)
[029 - September 2013](#)
[032 - Dec 2013/Jan 2014](#)

[024 - April 2013](#)
[027 - July 2013](#)
[030 - October 2013](#)

2012

[010 - Dec 2011/Jan 2012](#)
[013 - April 2012](#)
[016 - July 2012](#)
[019 - October 2012](#)

[011 - February 2012](#)
[014 - May 2012](#)
[017 - August 2012](#)
[020 - November 2012](#)

[012 - March 2012](#)
[015 - June 2012](#)
[018 - September 2012](#)
[021 - December 2012](#)

2011

[001 - March 2011](#)
[004 - June 2011](#)
[007 - September 2011](#)

[002 - April 2011](#)
[005 - July 2011](#)
[008 - October 2011](#)

[003 - May 2011](#)
[006 - August 2011](#)
[009 - November 2011](#)

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