



MEDICAL AND HEALTH SCIENCES



UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
FACULTY OF MEDICAL AND HEALTH SCIENCES
POSTDOCTORAL SOCIETY

FMHS Postdoctoral Society Annual Report 2020

Committee members (June 2020 – May 2021):

Presidents: Benjamin Dickson (RF – ACSRC), Haruna Suzuki-Kerr (RF – Physiology).

Secretaries: Anassuya Ramachandran (RF – MMP), Joanna Chu (RF – Population Health), Pratik Thakkar (RF – Physiology).

Treasurers: Erika Freemantle (RF – Anatomy and Medical Imaging), Rashika Karunasinghe (RF – Physiology).

Committee: Alana Cavadino (Biostatistician – Epidemiology and Biostatistics), Andrea Kwakowsky (SRF – Anatomy and Medical Imaging), Angelo Tedoldi (RF – Physiology), Ben Curran (RF – MMP), Bobbi Laing (RF – Nursing), Brett Wagner (RF – Surgery), Brya Matthews (SRF – MMP), Catherine Tsai (RF – MMP), Christine Arasaratnam (RF – Anatomy and Medical Imaging), Hamid Abbasi (RF – Physiology / ABI), Jacelyn Loh (SRF – MMP), Jennifer Hollywood (RF – MMP), Jie Zhang (RF – Ophthalmology), John Sluyter (RF – Epidemiology and Biostatistics), Lola Mugisho (RF – Ophthalmology), Renita Martis (RF – Physiology), Samantha Marsh (RF – Population Health), Samantha Simkin (RF – Ophthalmology), Sandy Lau (RF – O&G), Sarbjot Kaur (RF – Physiology), Simerdeep Dhillon (RF – Physiology), Sumudu Ranasinghe (RF – Physiology), Tet-Woo Lee (RF – ACSRC), Tomoko Aoyama (Visiting Scholar – Liggins), Veronika Sander (RF – MMP), William Schierding (RF – Liggins), Yuki Vyas (RF – Physiology / Physics).

Subcommittees:

- SUMMIT2020: Chaired by Sandy Lau
- Events: Chaired by Sandy Lau
- Professional Development: Chaired by Erika Freemantle and Rashika Karunasinghe
- Grants: Chaired by Catherine Tsai and Joanna Chu
- Communications: Chaired by Benjamin Dickson
- Advocacy: Chaired by Benjamin Dickson

Committee Meeting Dates 2020:

- 17/02, 21/04, 29/05, 18/06, 14/07, 20/08, 25/09, 22/10, 17/11, 17/12.
- AGM 11/06 (New committee elected).
- Sub-committee meetings on an 'as-needed' basis.

Budget Report

Funding of \$30,000 received from the Dean's Strategic Development Fund for 01/01/2019 – 31/12/2020; actual and projected spending is documented in the table below.

Budget Summary	Projected 2020		Actual 2020		Deviation %
	Total Cost	%	Total Cost	%	
Networking Events	\$4,700.00	15.7	\$4,914.00	17.5	4.55
Scientific Events	\$9,000.00	30.0	\$6,541.00	23.4	-27.3
Professional Development Events	\$1,200.00	4.0	\$23.00	0.08	-98.1
Grants	\$13,000.00	43.3	\$12,953.00	46.3	-0.36
Outreach/engagement	\$1,200.00	4.0	\$600.00	2.14	-50
Admin	\$500.00	1.7	\$2,971.00	10.6	494
TOTAL	\$30,000.00		\$28,002.00		-6.66

In light of the challenging financial circumstances resulting from COVID-19 we are grateful to Prof. Fraser for his encouragement to continue as usual and use our budget to provide support to our members this year. We were successfully able to redistribute the grant-allocation (described below), however with limited time available at the end of the year we were unable to reallocate event funding in the same way. To some degree this was reinforced by our success attracting external funding for SUMMIT2020.

After discussing the options for using these funds we elected to bolster the budgets of end-of-year events, make available more funds for publications grants (unfortunately with no further applications this resulted in \$2000 unspent) and renew some of our advertising materials (2x new pull-up banners, new stationery bearing the PDS logo). These materials will form a part of our events, outreach and engagement in 2021.

2020 Summary:

Overview/COVID Impact

This was a tough year with COVID-affecting all of us substantially. Our committee have been conscious of anxieties and stresses faced by our members as well as additional work requirements and difficulties imposed on them during this time. Due to the two lockdown periods and prolonged restrictions on gatherings imposed by the Government and University, many of our planned activities were affected; some were cancelled while others took place at reduced scale or were postponed. Where possible and safe we aimed to hold workshops in-person in order to maximise opportunities for collegiality. The effects of the pandemic on our activities are listed under each event subheading.

In 2020, the PDS has successfully conducted business in the following areas: social functions, publication and R&D grants, marketing and outreach activities, professional development workshops and our flagship research showcase, SUMMIT2020.

Networking Events:

The PDS runs a number of social events aiming to facilitate communication and networking amongst our members. These were planned as monthly coffee mornings, and special social events (PDS Birthday party, Christmas, Halloween, and other functions). Unfortunately this year, our plan for social functions were heavily affected by COVID-related restrictions on in-person gatherings. A number of events were postponed (SUMMIT2020, PGSA vs PDS Quiz, Professional Development workshop) while others were cancelled (Halloween social, Welcome Building 507, PDS Birthday party).

Monthly coffee: Our coffee mornings are a monthly social event to provide regular, casual networking opportunities to our early career community. These are held at the Superfino with the PDS providing free coffee and biscuits. We have had steady attendance from a broad cross-section of the Faculty throughout 2020 with 20-30 people at each session. We had particularly good attendance after the first New Zealand COVID lockdown, reflecting the great desire for social connection many staff felt after the isolation imposed by the COVID lockdown and decreased social interaction working at Level 2. Due to COVID-related restrictions on in-person gathering, some monthly coffees were cancelled.

Welcome Back Picnic: We kicked off 2020 with a 'Welcome Back' social event to bring together members after the summer break. This event was held on February 28th with soft-drinks and snacks at Outhwaithe Park and was attended by a modest, but enthusiastic group.

Virtual drinks: As part of our COVID-response, our committee organized "virtual drinks" via Zoom. PDS members were invited to attend, and were randomly assigned to smaller breakout rooms to network with fellow colleagues. We held two virtual drinks during the month of April/May the first lockdown and one further event in the second lockdown.

PDS vs. PGSA Quiz Night: Our annual quiz night was held on October 28th after postponement due to the re-entry into Level 3 imposed in Auckland. This was organized in collaboration with FMHS-PGSA, and held under Level 1 guidelines at Superfino. Members of PDS and PGSA were invited to register a team or simply to join a team on the evening. In total thirteen teams competed with a postdoctoral team once again taking first place.

PDS/PGSA combined Christmas Social: A social function was held in collaboration with the FMHS-PGSA committee on 11th December. Postgraduate students, postdoctoral fellows and associated members of the broader faculty community enjoyed pizza, drinks and ice-cream in the front courtyard of the faculty.

Grants:

Each year the PDS provides grants to aid career development of our members. These grants are assessed by the grant subcommittee who if needed, will organize additional assessment

panels from either PDS subcommittees or external groups where appropriate. Funding is awarded with focus on the merit to career development of the applicant, as well as the service contribution and scientific excellence demonstrated by the applicants. In 2020, 5 x publication grants, 7 x research development grants and 3 x travel grants were awarded (although due to the pandemic the travel grant awardees were unable to take these up). Further, with the disruptions of 2020 we were unable to offer further travel grants, instead reallocating this funding to publication grants and our pilot research and development programme.

Publication Grants: Publication grants are up to \$1,000 in value per grant, and awarded to publications published by PDS members as the first author. We have awarded 5 publication grants as below.

- Renita Martis (RF – Physiology) published in Oxidative Medicine and Cellular Longevity
- Peter Choi (RF - ACSRC) published in Molecules
- Andrea Kwakowsky (SRF – Anatomy and Medical Imaging) published in Molecules
- Jennifer Hollywood (RF – MMP) published in the Journal of the American Society of Nephrology
- Veronika Sander (RF – MMP) published in the American Journal of Physiology – Renal Physiology

Research and Development Grants: This year, we organized a special round of grants-in-aid called Research and Development Grants. The aim of these grants was to reallocate PDS funding support from travel to cover unforeseen costs associated with research in 2020. Priority was given to costs resulting from COVID-related research disruptions. This programme was considered a valuable addition to our portfolio and forms the basis of our proposed flexible funding grants for 2021. 7 x Research development grants (\$6484) were awarded to 9 applicants (2 x joint-applications).

- Bobbi Laing (RF – Nursing) to present at the 2020 ISONG virtual conference.
- Emma Buckels (RF – MMP) to attend the ASBMR 2020 virtual meeting.
- Julia Shanks (RF – Physiology) to attend the Echo Bachelor Class virtual course.
- Natasha Grimsey (SRF – Pharmacology) to cover research related costs arising due to COVID-19 lockdown.
- Yukti Vyas (RF – Physiology) to attend the CAJAL Advanced Neuroscience Training Programme Course.
- Sandy Lau and Colin Hisey (RFs – O&G) to cover domestic travel costs to establish a new collaboration.
- Victoria Egli and Niamh Donnellan (RFs – Nursing) to cover domestic travel to allow research recovery after COVID-19 lockdown.

Travel Grants: Due to the impact of COVID-19 and travel restrictions this year the awarded grants were not able to be used, however the awardees are still acknowledged as they completed the competitive application process and were notified of their success.

- Brigid Ryan (RF – Anatomy and Medical Imaging) to attend Alzheimer's Disease International in Singapore
- Renita Martis (RF – Physiology), to attend the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology Annual Meeting in Baltimore, USA
- Sarah Gerritsen (RF – Epidemiology and Biostatistics) to attend the World Public Health Nutrition Congress in Brisbane, Australia

Communication:

Improving our visibility and expanding outreaching opportunities is an ongoing challenge. In 2020 we assembled a new communications team who have redeveloped our communication procedures to streamline the dissemination of information through the various outlets at our disposal.

Website: Ongoing efforts aim to improve and maintain the PDS website. It is our aim that the website contains up-to-date information on the society, committee structure, funding opportunities and upcoming events as well as retaining information and resources associated with past events and grant rounds.

Newsletter: The monthly newsletter represents our best 'passive' communication outlet providing information and updates to all members and their colleagues. These newsletters have been very successful in capturing the interest of our PDS members. During the lockdowns we endeavoured to share stories of our committee members and the unique changes to their lives during this challenging time.

Social Media: Our communication team have been active on Facebook and Twitter providing information on upcoming events, live-updates on ongoing events as well as summaries of past events. Twitter and Facebook have been very successful in improving our visibility to both our members and to broader community and creating a point of communication during the uncertainty of 2020.

Avatar development: As the profile of the PDS builds we have become aware that the imagery presented in our communications reaches beyond the Faculty. We feel that this presents an opportunity to purposefully divest ourselves of the stereotypes of scientists and present a more accurate and aspirational view of a scientist in 2020. In order to achieve this we have developed 'figureheads' or 'avatars' who will be the faces of our communications going forward. Early in 2020 we put out a call for entries to an avatar competition challenging our members to produce faces that represent our membership without resorting to the tired stereotypes of scientists often portrayed in media. From the high-quality entries received we were unable to select just one avatar and have decided to proceed with two – Phoebe and Mira. They will be the faces of our social media accounts as well as appearing on media produced to advertise the PDS and our events. They have already been used in development of our new PDS banners to be displayed at our events. The winning artists were Joscelin Smith (PhD Candidate – Physiology) and Abby Davidson (Daughter – Alan Davidson [MMP]).

SUMMIT2020: Research Symposium

Sandy Lau led the SUMMIT subcommittee (Alana Cavadino, Anassuya Ramachandran, Brya Matthews, Catherine Tsai, Emma Buckels, Erika Freemantle, Haruna Suzuki-Kerr, Ivy Li, Jacelyn Loh, Lola Mugisho, Pratik Thakkar, Rashika Karunasinghe, Samantha Marsh, Sarbjot Kaur, Simerdeep Dhillon, Sumudu Ranasinghe, William Schierding) to organise and run SUMMIT2020 our annual research symposium. This was originally scheduled as a half-day event in July 2020, however due to the uncertainty faced early in the year we rescheduled for November 25th. There was overwhelming interest from our postdoctoral research community leading to re-development of the event into a full-day format which enabled 17 oral and 14 elevator pitch presentations. For many staff this was their sole opportunity to present research, or participate in a conference or symposium this year. The SUMMIT2020 team worked diligently through lockdowns and uncertainty and we are very proud to have offered our members a whole-day, in-person symposium.

External Sponsorship: Rashika Karunasinghe spearheaded our efforts to secure external sponsorship for this symposium, reinforcing existing relationships with past sponsors and developing relationships with new sponsors. Rashika was the lead author (co-authors: Sandy Lau, Brya Matthews, Haruna Suzuki-Kerr and Benjamin Dickson) of our successful Maurice and Phyllis Paykel Trust Conference Support Grant (\$2000). This funding was pivotal in enabling us to run a whole day symposium using the same budget previously used for a half-day event and we hope to continue this format in future years.

- Auckland Medical Research Foundation (\$3000)
- Maurice and Phyllis Paykel Trust (\$2000)
- New England Biolabs (\$1500)

- In Vitro Technologies (\$1000)
- Thermofisher (\$500)
- Carl Zeiss (\$500)
- Integrated Sciences (\$500)
- Merck (\$300)

Invited speakers: Invited speakers for this year's SUMMIT were:

- Professor Cindy Kiro (Pro Vice-Chancellor Māori)
- Associate Professor Brett Cowan (Chief Scientist at the Institute of Environmental Science and Research, ESR)

Postdoctoral Speakers: We had 17 oral presentations and 14 elevator pitches. Additionally we welcomed two guest presentations delivered by postdoctoral researchers at the Auckland Bioengineer Institute (Dr June-Chiew Han, Dr Hayley Reynolds).

Prizes were awarded as follows:

- 1st place oral presentation sponsored by AMRF: Dr Alex Muntz
- 2nd place oral presentation sponsored by In Vitro Technologies: Dr Julia Shanks
- 1st place elevator pitch presentation sponsored by New England Biolabs: Dr Yukti Vyas
- 2nd place elevator pitch presentation sponsored by Carl Zeiss: Dr Rhea Desai
- Outstanding abstract award sponsored by MPPT: Dr Amy Chen

Professional development workshops

The PDS aims to run regular professional development workshops. This year we were able to run two events, a CV workshop and a CRISPR scientific methodology workshop. Two further events (a statistical analysis workshop and FIRST team workshop) have been postponed until 2021.

CV workshop: Professor Laura Bennet ran a comprehensive workshop covering what reviewers are looking for in academic CVs and how to improve your chances of success. This workshop attracted strong interest from PDS members as well as non-academic staff and postgraduate students. We had over 100 attendees from across the Faculty filling the lecture theatre. Materials from the seminar are available on our website.

CRISPR workshop: A CRISPR workshop covering the scientific basis and practical application of CRISPR gene editing technology, was provided by Jennifer Hollywood and Veronika Sander using the computer facility available in the faculty. Approximately 50 attendees came to this 2.5 hour hands-on workshop to learn the basic of how CRISPR works, and how to design their own CRISPR experiments using tools available online. We have received positive feedback requesting follow-up workshop in 2021.

Advocacy

One of the key aims of the PDS is to maintain involvement in University decision making in order to coordinate bi-directional information flow. Many members feel that they do not have the time to attend the forums and other communication events, so we aim to fill this gap ensuring their needs are heard and that they receive accurate information on changes to University life. On a broader scale we aim to extend this involvement into national level groups to create connections and facilitate change at higher levels.

PDS Representation on Faculty and University Committees:

- Raewyn Poulsen and Brya Matthews served in 2020 as representative on Faculty Research Committee.
- Benjamin Dickson reported from the UoA Staff Advisory committee (no meetings in 2020).

Strategic plan submission: Benjamin Dickson and Brya Matthews drafted a comprehensive strategic plan submission from the PDS committee. The draft was circulated to the committee

for approval prior to submission. This submission was primarily focused on the Research & Innovation and People & Culture themes with a specific interest in how they incorporated the large body of so-called long-term, fixed-term staff. We were pleased to see some of the key themes of our submission included in the summary papers developed in production of *Taumata Teitei*.

Outreach: The PDS aims to facilitate and engage in activities and networking beyond FMHS. Through our use of social media we have developed connections with other postdoctoral groups around Aotearoa/NZ as well as within the University of Auckland. Key relationships have been developed with the Auckland Bioengineering Institute through members who hold joint appointments. Similarly, the crossover of our members with the Maurice Wilkins Centre Early Career Steering Group and Royal Society of New Zealand Early Career Forum has created the opportunity to engage on a national level in conversations around forming a nationwide postdoctoral group. We look forward to engaging further in this type of activity in 2021.

2021 Budget

In light of the financial situation faced by the University in 2021 we present a budget proposal primarily based around the actual spending of 2020. There is a modest increase (\$1000) over previous years, predominantly intended to bolster our Networking and Scientific events. These categories we feel provide the significant benefit in aiding our members to establish new collaborations and establish relationships with their peers.

Proposed Budget 01/2021 - 12/2021		Allocated
Networking Events	Coffee club (x12 @ \$150)	\$1,800
	Postdoc vs Student Quiz	\$1,200
	Postdoctoberfest/Halloween event	\$1,000
	Christmas Party	\$1,200
	Total allocated	\$5,200
Scientific Events	SUMMIT research symposium (half day)	\$4,500
	ECR speakers – Travel	\$3,000
	ECR speakers – Catering	\$1,000
	2 x methods lunches	\$500
	Total allocated	\$9,000
Professional Development	Careers (academia and otherwise) event	\$300
	Statistics workshop	\$200
	Commercialisation/VM workshop	\$300
	Total allocated	\$800
Grants	Publication grants	\$5,000
	Flexible funding	\$10,000
	Total allocated	\$15,000
Outreach/Engagement	ABI SBS FoS post doc forum	\$500
	Total allocated	\$500
Admin/ Other	Printing, gifts, prizes, miscellaneous	\$500
	Total allocated	\$500
TOTAL PROPOSED BUDGET		\$31,000

Planned Activities for 2020

Networking events: Our monthly coffee mornings have long been the best attended, regular event in our calendar. New friendships form, we get the chance to put faces to names and valuable conversations lead to new collaborations. We truly believe in the value of this event to our members and aim to run a coffee morning every month, whereas in the past we have often skipped months with major events as a cost-saving exercise.

We intend to keep running our 'traditional' events such as the PDS vs. PGSA quiz, Halloween event and Christmas party. Finally in 2020 we aimed to run more regular 'casual' events such as lunches in the domain, walking groups and bioinformatics events. These did not eventuate this past year, but we aim to implement this programme on an ad hoc basis in 2021.

Grants: As in previous years we will run our successful publication grants on a rolling basis, with advertising throughout the year. In past years we have run travel grants, however, in 2020 funding allocated to these was split between a bolstered publication grant fund and some small seed funding which enabled researchers to fill gaps in funding that arose due to the disruption. As we anticipate that international travel will remain restricted for much of 2021 we will revisit this small-grant concept allocating funding previously used for travel grants to a '**flexible-funding grant**'. These grants will be small in quantum, but aim to financially support our early- / mid-career postdoctoral researchers to undertake local/national travel, develop hui or attempt pilot experiments as the basis of new collaborations and/or to develop relationships with external stakeholders, especially within Māori and Pasifika communities. As with the publication grants these will be run on a rolling basis with applications judged to be of acceptable quality and impact funded on a first-come-first-served basis. These grants will provide opportunities and resources for ECRs that are flexible in purpose and can be provided in timely-fashion to aid academic portfolio development.

Communication: In 2020 we revamped our communications team, doubling its size and improving organisation. The team will continue to innovate with the monthly newsletter, use of the website and our presence on social media (Facebook and Twitter). From a relationship building perspective, we aim to continue growing our relationship with other related postdoctoral cohorts. A key example this year was interacting with the Auckland Bioengineering Institute, largely triggered by postdoctoral researchers who hold joint appointments between Engineering and Medical and Health Sciences. In this vein we hope to take advantage of similar links with the Faculty of Science, via their Postdoctoral Society. On a national scale we have links with broader early-career groups where there is growing interest in formation of a nation-wide postdoctoral network incorporating staff at Universities, Crown Research Institutes and other research organisations.

Scientific events: In 2020 we took the unprecedented step of running our flagship event SUMMIT as a whole day event in order to fill the void left by COVID-19 restrictions on travel and meetings. This format created space for a greater number of FMHS Postdoctoral staff to present as well as enabling us to extend invitations to postdoctoral speakers from the Auckland Bioengineering Institute in addition to our regular keynote speakers. Due to the generosity of our sponsors we were able to run this full day event without exceeding the pre-allocated budget. Anticipating similar restrictions on travel in 2021 we aim to return to this whole-day format, contingent on our ability to attract external funding. We hope to be able to continue our relationships with the Auckland Medical Research Foundation, the Maurice and Phyllis Paykel Trust as well as the commercial sponsors who funded us in 2020. With the current budget allocation we will be able to fall back to a half-day event if the funding landscape makes the full-day event unfeasible.

In lieu of the international speaker events we have run in the past, which were not possible in 2020, we intend to redirect this concept to focus on Aotearoa based researchers at the early- / mid-career level. This approach is more suited to the aims of the society and more feasible with the ongoing uncertainty we will no doubt face. We will identify suitable candidates and organise them to visit FMHS, provide a talk and small-group meetings as appropriate.

Finally we aim to round out our scientific programme for 2021 with skills-based events on high-interest topics. These will be hands-on workshops led by field experts drawn from within the University or could be run in conjunction with our aforementioned national speaker programme. We have also had significant interest from some of our SUMMIT2020 sponsors in contributing seminars, skill sessions, and talks on industry research careers. Past examples of these events include the 2020 CRISPR workshop and the 2019 microscopy workshop.

Professional development: In 2021 we intend to run a workshop dealing with topics around grant writing and grant management, especially with regard to collaborating with the FIRST team. We have been in discussions with the FIRST team around this in the latter part of 2020 and hope that this event will come together early in 2021. We have a statistics workshop under development which was pushed from 2020 due to time-constraints imposed by the National and Auckland lockdowns. We intend to develop workshops covering aspects of commercialization and Vision Mātauranga strategies for ECRs, which collectively will feed into developing successful grant applications and career development.

Advocacy: We will continue to be vocal on issues which affect our peers. Participation of our members on University and Faculty committees provides a medium for input on decision making and policy development. As in the past we will continue to provide feedback and submissions in University consultation processes in order to best advocate for policy that considers our often atypical career pathways. As in past years we intend to conduct a survey of PDS members in order to ensure we are reflecting their needs.