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THE WORKCOVER NSW RESEARCH CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

WorkCover NSW and the University of Newcastle established the WorkCover NSW Research Centre of Excellence (WRCE) in 2004. Located at the University's Central Coast campus at Ourimbah, the WRCE aims to be the national leader in quality occupational health and safety (OHS) and injury management research.

The WRCE works in conjunction with WorkCover to provide excellence in research and research training for the prevention of workplace injury and disease.

WorkCover helped to establish the Centre as part of its mandate under NSW legislation to help fund measures that prevent or minimise workplace injury and disease and to ensure the availability of high quality education and training in injury prevention, management and rehabilitation.

INTRODUCTION

This edition of *Research Central Coast* showcases the achievements of one of the flagship research centres based at the University of Newcastle Central Coast campus – the WorkCover NSW Research Centre of Excellence (WRCE).

As a leader in occupational health and safety and injury management research, the WRCE highlights the value and importance of strong research partnerships that have enduring influence. The work of the WRCE has the potential to impact on millions of workers across the world based on sound evidence-based approaches for preventing injury.

The WRCE is one example of the success of collaboration between the University and external partners. Please read on to learn more about the ground-breaking work of the Centre and the contribution of its Director, Professor Derek Smith, to improving health and safety in the workplace.

We also welcome Professor Smith to the position of Deputy Director Research (Central Coast) beginning in 2010 and look forward to his contribution beyond the Centre across our campuses and communities.

Professor Stephen Crump
Pro Vice-Chancellor and Director

Associate Professor William Gladstone
Deputy Director Research
(Central Coast)

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- University Professor takes smoking research to Oxford
- Central Coast hosts OHS 'Think Tank'
- Visiting expert in Environmental and Occupational Toxicology

MISSION STATEMENT:

OBJECTIVES

The WRCE's main objectives are to:

- provide evidence-based information and advice to employers, employees and industry partners
- raise the status and profile of OHS and injury management as a research field
- establish an international reputation for WRCE
- develop practical research that is applied in industry
- integrate OHS and injury management research and education
- raise community awareness of OHS and injury management
- support the prevention of workplace injury and disease
- engage with stakeholders including professional associations, employer and employee representative groups and other research centres.



PROFESSOR Derek Smith

“To provide sound evidence base for the protection of the health and safety of workers, provision of injury management and effective return to work.”

WORLD-LEADING STAFF

Professor Derek Smith joined the WorkCover NSW Research Centre of Excellence (WCRE) in 2008. A Professor of Environmental and Occupational Health in the University of Newcastle's Faculty of Health, his research encompasses a wide variety of topics including occupational health and safety issues, public health, tropical medicine, bibliometrics and medical history.

Professor Smith holds senior positions on the editorial boards of many international journals. He has a particular interest in collaborative partnerships between occupational health researchers from around the world.

Although Professor Smith's Australian research has encompassed many topics, some of his most recent work has highlighted the need for policy and programs to focus more on the workplace and the occupational factors that potentially contribute to smoking.

His other research has focused on public health and tropical medical science, and the need for greater collaboration with occupational health.

In August 2009, Professor Derek Smith was appointed a Visiting Professor at the Third Hospital of Hebei Medical University in China. His appointment follows a long-term research collaboration with the Third Teaching Hospital of Hebei Medical University in Shijiazhuang.

His research has investigated specific health and safety hazards in the Chinese health care workforce such as musculoskeletal disorders, occupational dermatoses and needle stick injuries; and broader issues including women's health, tobacco control and HIV.

AWARD-WINNING CONTRIBUTIONS

Professor Smith has been recognised for his world-leading research with a number of international awards including:

- The 2009 World Safety Organization (WSO) Concerned Citizen Award by the WSO Awards Committee
- The 2008 WSO Award for Achievement in Scientific Research and Development – presented to an individual or group that has made significant and internationally relevant contributions towards improving safety through research and development
- The 2008 Sidney Sax Oration and Medal – awarded by the Queensland branch of the Public Health Association of Australia to a “person who has provided a notable contribution to the protection and promotion of public health, solving public health problems, advancing community awareness of public health measures and advancing the ideals and practice of equity in the provision of health care.”

UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR TAKES SMOKING RESEARCH TO OXFORD

Professor of Occupational Health and Safety, Derek Smith, presented a new perspective on occupational smoking at the prestigious Oxford Round Table in March 2008.

The Oxford Round Table provides a forum for leading academics and policy makers to consider contemporary issues impacting the health and wellbeing of humankind. The themes of the 2008 Round Table were substance abuse and obesity.

Director of the WorkCover NSW Research Centre of Excellence, Professor Smith said he was honoured to have been invited to present at such an internationally significant forum hosted by Oxford University.

“My Australian research has highlighted the need for policy and programs to focus more on the workplace and the occupational factors that potentially contribute to smoking,” Professor Smith said.

“Male labourers and workers in related industries for example are the most likely to be smokers and male professionals the least likely. Similarly, female professionals are the least likely to smoke, while women working in labour-intensive jobs such as in the construction industry and service-related fields tend to have the higher smoking rates.

“While there are many public health interventions already underway to reduce smoking in the community, very few target people at work or specific occupations. If we are to make further inroads in reducing smoking rates then occupational factors must be addressed.”

Professor Smith said the Oxford Round Table brought together leaders from the public and private sectors around the world. “I was delighted to attend the event at such an iconic institution and to contribute to greater cooperation between occupational and public health academics.”



CENTRAL COAST HOSTS OHS 'THINK TANK'

Australia's leading occupational health and safety experts gathered at the University of Newcastle's Central Coast campus in June 2009 to consider the future direction of research in this field.

Hosted by the Workcover NSW Research Centre of Excellence (WRCE), the Research Directions Forum heard from leading academics, industry and employee representatives, and senior staff from Workcover NSW.

The Forum was part of Workcover NSW's vision for a national 'think tank' on the future of occupational health and safety (OHS) research in Australia.

Delegates considered the current and emerging issues relevant to OHS research. They formulated strategic directions for OHS research over the next five years and helped establish systems to foster collaborative links between OHS researchers and research centres. According to the participants, the top research priorities for the future were identified as being psychosocial and soft tissue injury hazards, work/life issues, and the impact of multiple, long-term exposures to hazards.

Strategies were discussed to enhance collaboration despite limited research funding. This included the need to focus on complementary skills, to make the best use of Safe Work Australia (the independent national statutory agency with primary responsibility to improve OHS and workers' compensation arrangements across Australia), and to foster closer engagement with research communities.

Information gathered from the forum will allow for significant progress in developing a key set of national OHS research priorities for Australia. As a result, investigations into the psychosocial aspects of work, as well as some of the more subtle, long-term hazards to which certain workers are being exposed, should now be actively sought and funded at both the state and national level.





“This significant achievement will help further develop occupational health research opportunities internationally and across Australia,” Professor Smith said.

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

The University of Newcastle-based WorkCover NSW Research Centre of Excellence (WRCE) has recently been designated a World Safety Organization (WSO) Collaborating Center for Occupational Safety and Health.

The WSO promotes safety and accident prevention professions and related fields and strives for continuous professional development of and increased benefits for all practitioners in these fields. It also acts in an advisory capacity to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

The WSO's motto is 'Making Safety a Way of Life... Worldwide' and it coordinates functions, activities, operations and related works with other international bodies and organizations. It supports activities of other national and international professional organizations in their attempts to protect people, property, resources and the environment.

The WRCE's role as a Collaborating Center for Occupational Safety and Health will include:

- providing evidence-based information and advice to employers, employees and industry partners
- raising the status and profile of occupational safety and health and injury management as a research field in itself
- developing practical research that is applied in industry
- raising community awareness of occupational safety and health and injury management
- supporting the prevention of workplace injury and disease
- engaging with stakeholders including professional associations, employer and employee representative groups and other research centres.

Director of the WRCE Professor Derek Smith said he was delighted to join the network of collaborating centres.

“This significant achievement will help further develop occupational health research opportunities internationally and across Australia,” Professor Smith said.

VISITING EXPERT IN ENVIRONMENTAL AND OCCUPATIONAL TOXICOLOGY

In June 2009, the WorkCover NSW Research Centre of Excellence (WRCE) hosted a visiting expert in environmental toxicology.

Professor Ping-Chi Hsu presented a seminar discussing occupational and environmental risks to male reproductive health. His research has focused on different areas of environmental toxicology and he has been published in many leading scientific journals including the Lancet, the Journal of the American Medical Association and Environmental Health Perspectives.

Professor Hsu is Professor and Chairman of the Department of Safety, Health and Environmental Engineering at the National Kaohsiung First University of Science and Technology in Taiwan.

Director of the WRCE Professor Derek Smith said he was delighted to host such a world-renowned researcher. “Hosting Professor Hsu has helped lay the foundations for extended international collaboration in occupational and environmental health research at the University of Newcastle.”

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