

# Delivering the Future



women & infants  
research foundation

Summer 2019

#ausoftheyear



**A Professor  
and a pioneer**

# Welcome to the latest edition of Delivering the Future.

**2019 has been an incredible year of growth and highlights for WIRF on multiple fronts.**

National awards for our researchers have been coupled with incredible successes in delivering a suite of major events for the WA community.

Featured in this edition are stories outlining a breakthrough finding in our Steroid Optimisation study, a recap of our WIRF 2019 Spring Gala spectacular, an update on our pioneering Artificial Womb program, and a feature story on an innovative WA course which is improving the performance of specialist obstetricians and gynaecologists both nationally and internationally.

Beyond our commitment to research excellence, WIRF sets its sights on solutions – using our research findings to kick-start and sustain positive change.

The launch of the Top End chapter of The Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance (page 4) speaks directly to these guiding principles.

Working with maternity care providers and allied health professionals in the Top End, we are committed to tackling the NT's alarming rates of preterm birth

– currently the second highest in the country – with particular emphasis on improving outcomes for our Aboriginal mothers.

On a sad note, we recently lost an incredible member of the WIRF family in Volunteer, Leah McVeigh.

For more than 20 years Leah served as a Café Volunteer and fundraised tirelessly for WIRF and KEMH. Leah touched thousands of women and families at King Eddies and will be incredibly missed by all that knew her.

WIRF is lucky to be the chosen beneficiary of some special organisations and their personal fundraising events. Our story on page 8 outlines the incredible fundraising efforts led by the Rotary Club of Nedlands on behalf of WA babies born in need.

In finishing, we were delighted to hear news of the 2019 Telethon fundraising result. The generosity of the Western Australian community clearly knows no bounds.

As a proud beneficiary, this means that WIRF can continue to fight for those who need us most; women, mothers and their babies.



We hope you enjoy reading about some of WIRF's recent news and activities in this latest edition of Delivering the Future, and hope also that you feel as proud as we do of being a part of our organisation and for enabling these successes – we cannot do it without you – thank you.



**Professor John Newnham AM**  
Chief Scientific Director



**Deb Attard Portughes**  
Chief Operations Director



Cover: 2020 Senior Australian of the Year for WA, Prof. John Newnham; Above: From left: Yarlalu Thomas, Annie Fogarty, the Hon Kim Beazley AC, Suzy Urbaniak, and Professor John Newnham

## Preterm birth pioneer named as Senior Western Australian of the Year

**In recognition of a life dedicated to saving and improving the lives of women, infants and families, WIRF'S Chief Scientific Director, Professor John Newnham, has been named as the 2020 Senior Western Australian of the Year.**

Professor Newnham was recognised along with other category winners as part of the 2020 Australian of the Year Awards held recently at Government House. He will join other state and territory recipients for the national awards ceremony at the National Arboretum in Canberra on 25 January 2020.

A Professor of Obstetrics, Professor Newnham has been instrumental in making Western Australia an international hotspot for research and clinical excellence in pregnancy and life before birth. In 1989, he founded and led the pioneering Raine Study; the world's first and most enduring pregnancy-focused lifetime cohort project.

In 2014, he developed the state-wide program for preventing preterm birth, The Whole Nine Months; a pioneering initiative which resulted in an 8% reduction in premature births across WA. In 2018, he would expand the WA initiative by founding the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance – the world's first ever national program of its kind.

Chair of the WIRF Board, Rowena Smith, said John had devoted his life to medicine and research for the advancement of all women, mothers and their babies.

"John epitomises the characteristics of a medical practitioner at their best: intelligent, innovative, compassionate and honourable," she said.

"His ability to inspire others is amazing and his contributions to the field of obstetrics and preventing premature

birth are making a difference across Australia and beyond."

The win in the prestigious national awards comes on the back of Professor Newnham being honoured with the Australian Medical Association's (AMA) preeminent award in June 2019.

**Professor Newnham was awarded the AMA WA's prestigious Hippocrates Award in recognition of his long term and long-lasting contributions to health and medicine in Western Australia.**

AMA (WA) President Dr Omar Khorshid said Professor Newnham's successful work in reducing pre-term births was now acknowledged around the world.

"His determination to continue his research in WA has set a benchmark for many others," Dr Khorshid said.

"John has always believed that life begins before birth, not after, and he has inspired many others to concentrate on finding further ways of lowering the rate of pre-term birth, which is the single major killer of children up to five years of age and a major cause of lifelong disability."

### The WIRF Vision

For all Australian women to enjoy the best health for themselves, their pregnancies and their babies.

#### About WIRF

WIRF is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving the health of women and infants.

We focus our research and programs across three principal areas: the prevention of preterm birth, gynaecological cancers, and women's mental health. Our research and programs have directly contributed to a number of improved clinical practices and health outcomes.

- Leading the world in preterm birth prevention**
- Discovering causes and cures of women's cancers and improving outcomes**
- Improving access to mental health resources and enabling better mental health outcomes**
- Translating our research findings into guidelines and resources.**



"John epitomises the characteristics of a medical practitioner at their best: intelligent, innovative, compassionate and honourable."

Rowena Smith,  
Chair of WIRF Board

## Latest on our Artificial womb

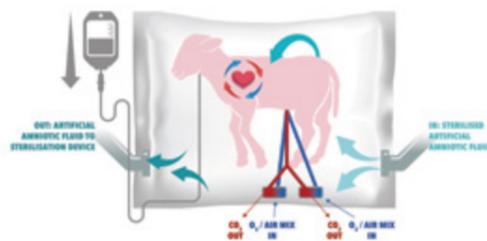
**Recent advances with WIRF's Artificial Womb project continue to capture the keen interest of the global scientific and medical community.**

In a world first, the research team has recently completed an extensive study using compromised extremely preterm fetuses.

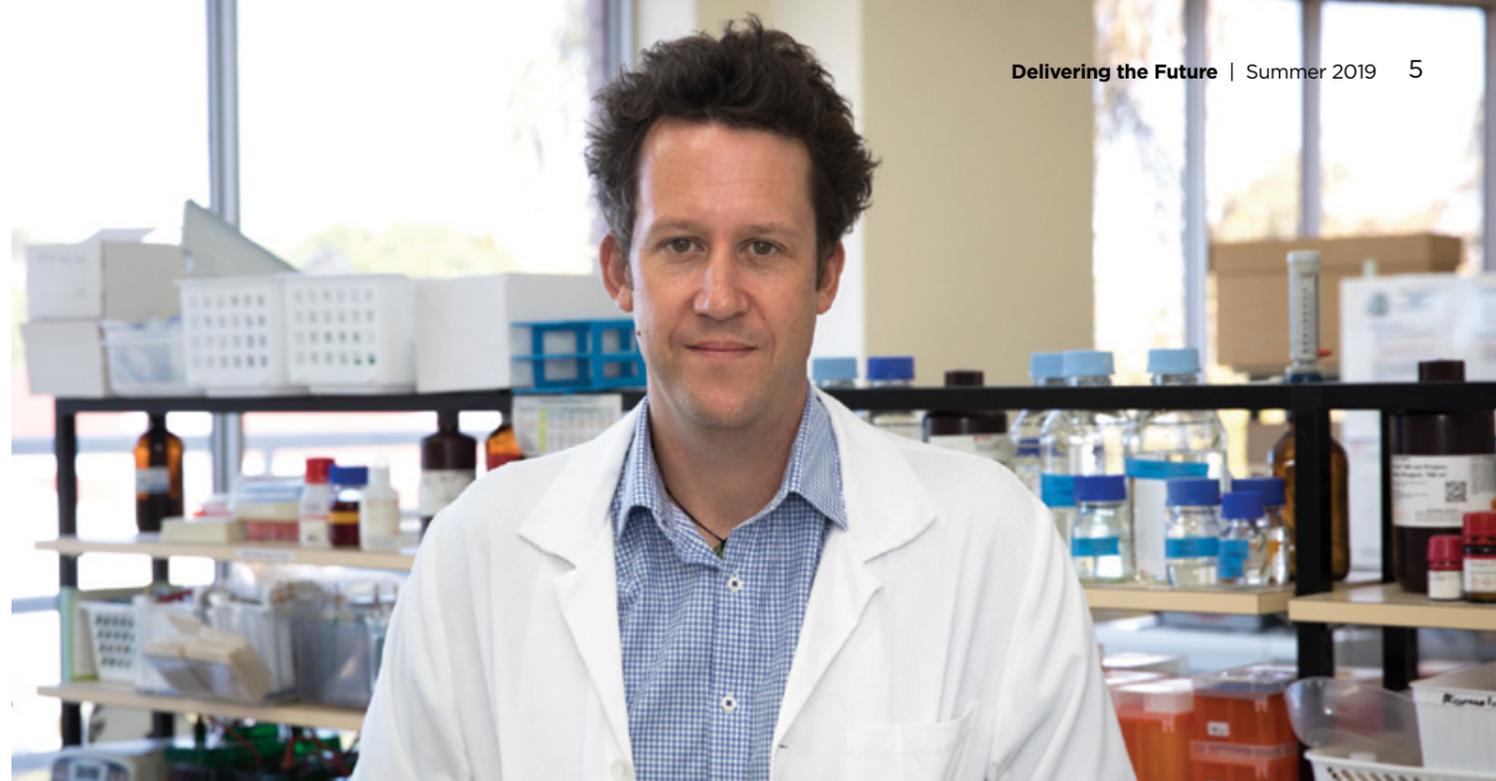
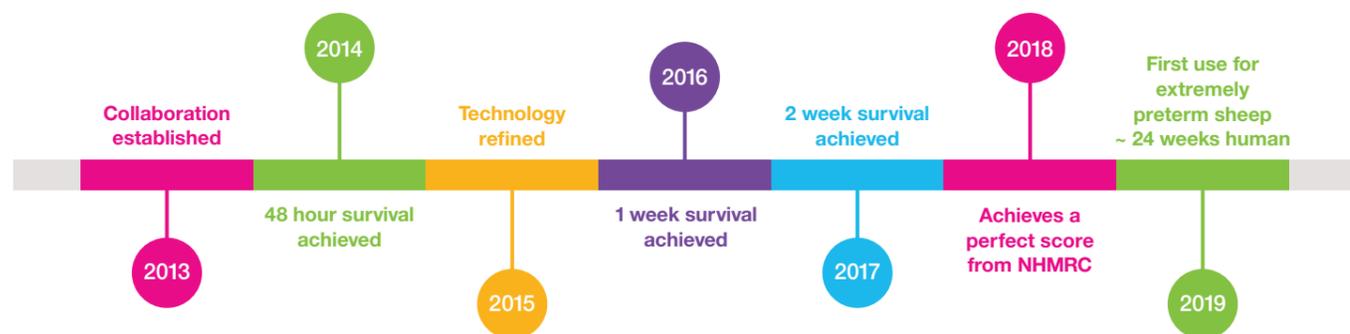
The result underscores the potential clinical application of this technology for extremely preterm infants born at the border of viability.

This is important because the likely clinical population for this technology will be not only extremely preterm, but also from a pregnancy with severe complications such as growth restriction, infection, and placental dysfunction.

The goal is to align our research methodology, including the fetuses themselves, to be as close as possible to the eventual clinical target of this technology.



The next phase of the project will see the research team evaluate data generated from this study to run extremely long-term experiments and then transition fetuses to pulmonary ventilation in advance of clinical studies.



WIRF's Associate Professor Matt Kemp

## Steroid study reveals breakthrough finding for mothers

**A pioneering research program aiming to optimise steroid dosing in pregnancy to mature the fetal lung is set to benefit the millions of families worldwide at risk of delivering preterm.**

The long-standing collaborative has used a fetal sheep model to determine the durability of antenatal steroid effectiveness.

Given the strong link between excess fetal steroid exposure and growth restriction, and the global use of this drug, these results are already impacting the field of antenatal medicine.

Findings have shown that a single low dose of steroid should be sufficient for women delivering within two days of treatment.

WIRF's Local Chief Investigator, Associate Professor Matt Kemp, explained that the use of steroid therapy in pregnancy to rapidly mature the fetal lung has been responsible for saving the lives of countless thousands of preterm babies.

However, treatment effectiveness and durability likely depends on the fetal

steroid exposure, and the treatment to the time of expected preterm delivery.

Findings have revealed that the duration of fetal steroid exposure can be adjusted for the desired period of treatment effectiveness, and in women expected to deliver within 48 hours, a single dose of antenatal steroid should be adequate.

The lungs of extreme premature babies are often too structurally and functionally under-developed for the baby to breathe easily, and those born at the earliest gestational ages may suffer from severe and life-long problems such as cerebral palsy, developmental delay or blindness.

The findings represent a clear pathway to optimising health outcomes in cases where preterm birth is inevitable.

This work has demonstrated that the durability of lung maturation from antenatal steroids depends critically on the duration of exposure to the unborn baby.

The study expands on our work in understanding how fetal steroid exposure can change the durability of preterm lung maturation and reinforces

that acute, high concentration steroid exposure do not convey additional benefit.

This work has been supported by GlaxoSmithKline-Save the Children, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Channel 7 Telethon Trust and the Women & Infants Research Foundation.



## Alliance tackles preterm birth rates in the Top End

**The Northern Territory's alarming rates of preterm birth are in the crosshairs of some of the country's leading obstetricians and maternity care providers.**

Leading health professionals from around the country gathered as part of the recent Top End launch of the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance to discuss a way forward in addressing the NT's rates of preterm birth - currently the second highest in the country.

Indigenous obstetrician and gynaecologist, and Co-Lead of the NT Alliance, Dr Kiarna Brown said that a staggering 1 in 12 babies in Australia are born premature, and for many Territorians, the news is much worse.

"While the NT's preterm birth rate for its Non-Indigenous population was comparable to the National average at 8%, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies this rate is almost double at over 14%. The biggest discrepancy is in the extremely preterm

gestational age," Dr Brown said.

Co-Lead, Dr Carina Cotaru explained the event was focussed on canvassing the scope of the problem in the NT and recruiting key stakeholders for the local Initiative.

"Ours is an ambitious undertaking, however the health and future wellbeing of the babies of the Territory, and hence future Territorians, are at stake."

Key areas for implementation include: the provision of appropriate ultrasound services, and support from the NT Health Department for the funding of research and the promotion of the Initiative which has grown out of the success of WIRF's pioneering Western Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative.

To-date the Alliance has held launch events in the Northern Territory, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory, with plans for a launch event in South Australia in February 2020.



Top End Alliance Co-Leads, Dr Kiarna Brown and Dr Carina Cotaru

The findings represent a clear pathway to optimising health outcomes in cases where preterm birth is inevitable.

# Spring Gala

2019

SATURDAY 31 AUGUST

**Spring Gala**  
stuns and  
inspires

**An incredible line up of guests descended onto Fraser's State Reception Centre for the 2019 WIRF Spring Gala at which an astounding \$182,000 was raised to support the Foundation's critical work to improve the health of all women, mothers and babies.**

Guests including leading philanthropists, sporting personalities, private industry, and health and medical representatives, joined WIRF's Ambassadors, Mike and Amy Hussey for WIRF's flagship event.

WIRF Ambassador, Amy Hussey, said the event represents the very best qualities from our WA community.

"Business, families and individuals that support this incredible event are selfless, inspired, and united in their passion to helping WIRF build healthy families," she said.

"This event truly represents a coming together of the WA community on a scale that the Foundation could never have imagined and each year this incredible partnership grows."

MC's Mark Readings and Lesa Hinchliffe beautifully framed the evening which was headlined by keynote speakers Josh and Lauren Catalano who spoke of their family's journey of preterm birth with their second son Lenny.

Born at just 24 weeks in 2016, Lenny would face and conquer multiple health challenges as part of his 150 day stay in the neonatal intensive care unit.

Creative directors and stylists, Matthew Landers and Mardie Rosich, joined Wholesale Flowers Bunbury and the acclaimed Handpan instrumentalist, Sam Maher, in bringing the Springtime spectacular to life.

WIRF would like to make special mention of the Major Sponsor of the 2019 WIRF Spring Gala, Linneys, and

Event Sponsors: Hartleys, Vasse Felix, Howard Park Wines, Tomasi Wines, Parkwood Plumbing Centre, Canal House Consulting, Alyka, The Montauk Lighting Company and Clevertronics.

Also warranting special mention are the Spring Gala Steering Committee - Georgina Egerton-Warburton, Catriona Parker, Amy Hussey, Anita Moullin, Deb Portughes, Gillian Booth-Yudelman and Richie Hodgson - who worked tirelessly to deliver the 2019 event.



Deb Portughes, Alan Linney, Michelle Linney

## Spring Gala gallery



Handpan maestro, Sam Maher



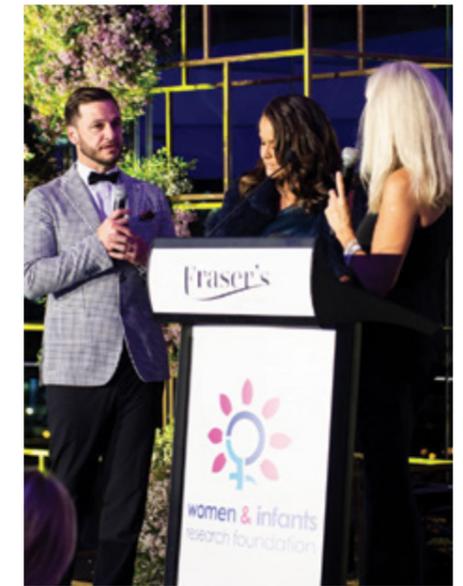
From left: Gillian Booth-Yudelman, Georgina Egerton-Warburton, Deb Portughes, Amy Hussey, Catriona Parker, Anita Moullin, Richie Hodgson



WIRF Ambassadors, Amy and Mike Hussey



WIRF's Professor John Newnham



Josh and Lauren Catalano with Lesa Hinchliffe

## Build your partnership with WIRF

Generous support from businesses and individuals continues to play a vitally important role in enabling us to deliver the WIRF Spring Gala - now a highly anticipated fixture on the WA calendar of events.

WIRF is currently seeking interested Event Partners, Major Supporters, and Prize Donors for our 2020 WIRF Spring Gala to be held on Saturday, 29 August 2020 at Fraser's State Reception Centre.

If you are able to assist in shaping and ensuring the success of this very important event, or another area of the Foundation's activity, please contact WIRF on 0408 128 099 or [richie.hodgson@wirf.com.au](mailto:richie.hodgson@wirf.com.au)



We look forward to partnering with you!



WIRF Social Work Volunteers, Deb Salamone and Liz Chidlow

“Engaging philanthropically with local businesses to generate awareness and support for community projects – it’s what Rotary does.”

Chris Richardson, President, Rotary Club of Nedlands

## Rotary spearheads major appeal for WA babies

**Western Australian babies born in need of essential clothing and blankets are to be the winners from an incredible fundraising event led by the Rotary Club of Nedlands and The Local on Waratah.**

The recent event saw more than 80 people descend on the Dalkeith restaurant to learn more about WIRF’s critical work and raise an incredible \$5000 for our Baby Bundles program.

President, Rotary Club of Nedlands, Chris Richardson said this event epitomises what Rotary is all about.

“Engaging philanthropically with local businesses to generate awareness and support for community projects – it’s what Rotary does,” he said.

“The generosity of management and staff at The Local on Waratah in partnering with the Rotary Club of Nedlands is a perfect example of good people working together to achieve great results for an even better cause. A big thank you to all involved.”

WIRF’s Baby Bundles program exists to support WA families in need by providing essential babywear and blankets for those that are born preterm, in an emergency, or to mothers in desperate situations.

WIRF applauds the philanthropy and commitment of the Rotary Club of Nedlands and The Local on Waratah to help the state’s most vulnerable residents.

Below: Tim and Andrea Lyons, Michael Elias and Charles Bro



Above: Joe Oxley and Don Hopkins;  
Below: Gillian Booth-Yudelman, Bob Noll and Edwina Noll

## Spotlight on...Dr Paul Cohen



**Despite his many appointments, publications and awards, it is a simple yet powerful philosophy which continues to drive WIRF’s co-lead of women’s cancer research, Dr Paul Cohen.**

“Every day I see the devastating impact of women’s cancers. It’s what drives me to find new ways to eradicate these diseases,”

Dr Cohen explains.

As lead investigator on several current research projects which are discovering causes and cures for women’s cancers and improving the lives of sufferers, Dr Cohen has a unique understanding of the many

hats required of a cancer clinician and researcher.

“In the clinic we are caregivers and it is very rewarding to care for patients on an individual level,” he said. “But research gives you the possibility of helping people on an entirely different scale.”

In addition to his lead role with WIRF, Dr Cohen is a consultant gynaecologist with the Western Australian Gynaecological Cancer Service at King Edward Memorial Hospital, Director of Gynaecological Cancer Research at St John of God Subiaco Hospital and a Clinical Associate Professor in the Division of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Western Australia.

His research interests include patient-reported outcomes and the supportive care of women affected by gynaecological malignancies, cancer genetics, the management of patients with cervical pre-cancer and cancer, and the epidemiology of gynaecological malignancies. He is a co-investigator in a number of clinical trials.

Dr Cohen is the current program chair of the Australia and New Zealand Gynaecological Oncology Group (ANZGOG) Annual Scientific Meeting and a Director of ANZGOG.

Reflecting on his initial inspiration for a career in gynaecological oncology is an easy task for Dr Cohen.

“During my obstetrics and gynaecology specialist training, my gynaecological oncology term was a revelation. I worked for some inspirational clinicians and mentors who encouraged me to pursue a career in the subspecialty,” he said.

“The continuity of patient care, opportunities for research, and working in a multidisciplinary team are very rewarding.”

Among his many contributions to the field, Dr Cohen’s research into outcomes following treatment for screen-detected glandular cervical pre-cancer led to new practice recommendations in the 2017 cervical cancer screening guidelines.

His continued work into pioneering clinical trials, prevention of hereditary breast and ovarian cancers, and improving cervical cancer screening rates among Aboriginal women in regional and remote WA, is testament to Dr Cohen’s ‘no stone left unturned’ approach.

“Patients who participate in clinical trials generally have improved outcomes and research is critical to improve the lives of women with gynaecological cancer. Virtually every advance in cancer survival has come about because of clinical trials.”

“We need to stay focused on outsmarting these diseases.”

## Leaving a bequest to WIRF

A world without heart-breaking stories of preterm birth and significantly improved cancer and mental health outcomes could be the legacy you leave behind to your loved ones with a Bequest to WIRF.

Often people who choose to include WIRF in their Will have had a preterm birth, cancer or mental health experience. They have helped make some of the most significant breakthroughs in medical research possible. These people have become heroes to the families that enjoy problem free pregnancies and cancer patients still alive thanks to new and improved treatments.

If you would like to learn more about leaving a Bequest to WIRF, please contact WIRF on 08 6458 1437 or [deborah.portughes@wirf.com.au](mailto:deborah.portughes@wirf.com.au)





## Milestone for local O&G surgical training workshop with a difference

**Next year marks the 20th anniversary of The Anatomy of Complications Workshop (ACW) series making it one of Australia's longest-running, not-for-profit surgical training courses.**

The Workshop provides obstetricians and gynaecologists from WA and around the world with advanced training in the management of life-threatening surgical complications.

ACW has been administered through WIRF since 2015, continuing long-standing relationships with KEMH and UWA. Workshop Director, Dr Robyn Leake said the idea for the Workshops was conceived and developed by Clin Assoc Prof Ian Hammond, Mr John Taylor and Prof Paul McMenamin when they recognised a real need among their specialist colleagues.

"They found that some were not always comfortable in dealing with inadvertent injury to urological, gastrointestinal and major vascular structures," she said.

"To assist with this we run two types of programs; standard (or open) and laparoscopic. Both provide an intensive and hands-on learning experience, conducted in state-of-the-art facilities right here in Perth."

Over the last two decades both the number of participants per workshop, and the number of workshops have been significantly increased in response to demand. It's estimated that over 1,600 medical professionals, both in Australia and overseas, have benefited from this training.

Co-Convenors, Clin Assoc Prof Krish Karthigasu, and Prof Yee Leung, are supported by a team of highly-valued facilitators, all dedicated to building the capacity and expertise of their colleagues.

So dedicated in fact, that they all donate their time.

**Professor Yee Leung said that each workshop represents an incredibly valuable experience for both attendees and facilitators alike.**

"The way our Workshops are structured allow for maximum interaction between participants and facilitators... The interdisciplinary approach between urology, rectal surgeons, obstetricians and gynaecologists, is another of the essential components of our workshops," Prof Leung said.

According to local consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist Dr Jennifer Pontre: "The workshops have been absolutely pivotal to my training, surgical ability and knowledge of anatomy. In fact there is no better way to learn the skills I have learned doing the workshop, and it has absolutely translated into a direct benefit for both the patients I operate on, as well as the trainees I now teach."

Clin Assoc Prof Krish Karthigasu said the non-for-profit Workshops also contribute to further education and research through the annual \$20K Taylor-Hammond Research Scholarship and the ACW Pacific Scholarship. In addition, local medical students are invited to attend the Workshops free-of-charge.

ACW is fortunate to have the backing of major sponsors Medtronic and Applied Medical but are still in need of financial support to continue its important work. If you are interested in knowing more, please contact ACW Coordinator Laura Radovan via [acw@wirf.com.au](mailto:acw@wirf.com.au)

For more information on The Anatomy of Complications Workshop visit: [www.acworkshop.com](http://www.acworkshop.com)

## A focussed approach to better mental health

**Recognising that mental health and mental illness are on a continuum, WIRF's research is centred around improving mental health as well as reducing the prevalence and burden of mental health problems and mental illness.**

Led by WIRF's Professor Megan Galbally, our research is unravelling the biological, psychological and social factors that contribute to women's emotional health across a life-course.

**Alarmingly, mental health is a leading cause of maternal mortality in pregnancy and the first 12 months after childbirth.**

A current WIRF study led by Professor Galbally is examining the risks and benefits associated with antidepressant medication in pregnancy on both the mother and the fetus/infant.

"This study will focus on the developmental precursors of mental

health disorders during early childhood in the context of maternal perinatal mental illness," Prof Galbally said.

"It will provide unique data for WA on the relationship between maternal and infant emotional wellbeing and early risk factors for vulnerability to mental illness."

Together with key collaborators, WIRF hope to improve access to mental health resources to enable better mental health and wellbeing outcomes for women, mothers and their children.

## Partnering with WIRF for your cause

WIRF is lucky to be the chosen beneficiary of some special people and their personal fundraising events.

Community-based fundraising forms a critical part of enabling our research programs and our ability to innovate and respond to major health problems.

If you or a team are involved in a community event like a triathlon, marathon, movie or bake sale, we encourage you to consider fundraising on behalf of WIRF.

WIRF can help you with

- Setting up a crowdfunding page
- Securing pre and post event media coverage
- Positive promotion through social media platforms
- Other marketing and promotion activities.

To find out more about community-based fundraising with WIRF, and how we can take your event or cause to the next level, contact WIRF on 6458 1387 or [info@wirf.com.au](mailto:info@wirf.com.au)



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Signing up for our newsletter at  
[wirf.com.au/newsletter-sign-up](http://wirf.com.au/newsletter-sign-up)



**Yes, I would like to make a donation to the Women and Infants Research Foundation to improve the health of women and infants through:**

- Research into the prevention of preterm birth and other pregnancy complications
- Research to improve outcomes for women with gynaecologic cancers
- Research to improve resources and outcomes for women's mental health
- WIRF general day-to-day operations

Name: Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Suburb: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (W) \_\_\_\_\_ (H) \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Monthly Pledge**

I wish to become a regular supporter and give a tax deductible donation each month of:

- \$25  \$50  \$100 \$  Other (minimum \$10)

I wish to pay by:

- Direct Debit** from my bank account  
(Please fill in Direct Debit Request)
- Credit Card** (Please fill in details or call 08 6458 1437)

**Donation**

I would like to make a single tax deductible donation of:

- \$100  \$300  \$750  \$1000  \$5000
- \$  Other (minimum \$10)

I wish to pay by:

- Credit Card** (Please fill in details or call 08 6458 1437)
- Cheque / Money Order**(enclosed)  
(Payable to Women and Infants Research Foundation)

I am interested in making a bequest in my will.

**Credit Card Details**

- MasterCard  Visa

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Exp Date: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Cardholder Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Direct Debit Request**

I/we request that you draw by way of Direct Debit \$  per month, for the payment of a monthly donation to WIRF.

My/Our Account details are:

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_ Account Holder Name: \_\_\_\_\_

BSB: \_\_\_\_\_ Account Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



**Thank you for your support**

All donations of \$2 and over are tax deductible.

**Women and Infants Research Foundation**

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