

## STUDENT ON QUEST FOR CANCER SCREENING INFO WINS RICHARD LOVELL TRAVELLING SCHOLARSHIP

A PhD candidate studying ways to improve breast cancer screening is the recipient of the inaugural Richard Lovell Travelling Scholarship, honouring the first professor of medicine at the University of Melbourne.

Carolyn Nickson, PhD student at the Key Centre for Women's Health in Society and the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, has been awarded the \$5000 scholarship to visit research centres in Europe to explore questions about mammographic density and the effectiveness of screening.

The Richard Lovell Travelling Scholarship is an annual award offered to master of science or doctor of philosophy students studying within the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences in a field related to cancer epidemiology.

Professor Richard Lovell (1918-2000), appointed to the foundation chair of medicine in 1955, taught medical students for more than 30 years. He pioneered many areas of academic medicine, particularly clinical epidemiology, and made outstanding contributions to cancer control and human research ethics in Australia.

In Australia, free breast cancer screening is available every two years through the BreastScreen program. Research over the last decade has shown that women who have high levels of mammographic density (dense tissue in their breasts that makes areas in mammograms whiter than usual) benefit less from screening.

Breast cancers detected in women with high density tend to be larger by the time they are detected, and are more likely to be detected during the two-year gap between scheduled screens. Breast density tends to be higher in younger women and in women who use hormone replacement therapies.

Professor Anne Kavanagh from the KCWHS leads a research program into this problem which has produced significant findings internationally and has created a record of density measurements for over 10,000 women screened by BreastScreen Victoria. For her PhD study, Carolyn is using Professor Kavanagh's research data in combination with full screening histories of all women who had cancer detected by BreastScreen Victoria over a ten-year period.

She is developing a simulation model that replicates the Victorian screening program to determine whether screening could be improved for women with high mammographic density, if they were offered more frequent screening.

She will use the scholarship to visit several research centres in Europe to seek feedback about her methodology and findings, including the Cancer Research UK Epidemiology Unit at Oxford University.

Her PhD supervisors are Associate Professor Anne Kavanagh and Associate Professor Ray Watson.



*At the Richard Lovell Travelling Scholarship presentation: Prof. James Angus, Dean of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences,; A/Prof. Anne Kavanagh; Carolyn Nickson; and Prof. Doreen Rosenthal, Director of the Key Centre for Women's Health in Society.*