Welcome to the third edition of the Hutchison/MRC Research Centre newsletter. We are delighted to report on the scientific recognition and successes of Hutch staff at all levels, from our students to group leaders and Directors. This edition of the newsletter also highlights some of our public outreach and media activities, and the ways in which we are using new social media to communicate our work to a broader audience.

Professor Ashok Venkitaraman
Professor Ron Laskey
Professor Bruce Ponder
Joint Directors, Hutchison/MRC Research Centre

To undertake world leading research into cancer cell biology that can be translated into clinical practice

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Professor Ron Laskey wins Royal Society Royal Medal

The Royal Society announced in July that Ron Laskey, Joint Director of the MRC Cancer Cell Unit, had been awarded the Royal Medal “for his pivotal contributions to our understanding of the control of DNA replication and nuclear protein transport, which has led to a novel screening method for cancer diagnosis.”

The Royal Medal was established by King George IV and first awarded in 1826. Only three medals are awarded each year and previous recipients have included Michael Faraday, Charles Darwin, Joseph Lister and Francis Crick. Ron was awarded his medal in the category of “most important contributions to the advancement of Natural Knowledge”.

Commenting on the award Ron said, “It feels both flattering and humbling to see the list of past recipients but it is particularly pleasing to receive this level of recognition from your peers. I am particularly grateful to the past and present members of my research team, whose efforts have made this recognition possible”.

Ashok Venkitaraman, MRC CCU Joint Director, expressing the views of all members of the Hutch, said, “Ron’s work over the years has provided a foundation for many topical and important fields in biomedical research. The way in which he has translated his fundamental research on DNA replication to the development of important new tools for the early diagnosis of human cancers is a lesson in how biological knowledge can be used to benefit human health. I am delighted that Ron’s outstanding contributions to the biomedical sciences have been recognised by the Royal Society”.

Message from the Directors

Professor Ashok Venkitaraman
Professor Ron Laskey
Professor Bruce Ponder
Joint Directors, Hutchison/MRC Research Centre
Hutch students on top at Graduate Research Symposium

A Graduate Research Symposium organised by the University’s Clinical School saw students from the Hutch scoop a raft of prizes. The event, which took place in June, involved students from all Departments within the Clinical School communicating their research as either oral or poster presentations. Students from the Hutch won prizes across a number of categories. Congratulations to all our winners who are listed below.

- **Oral Presentation Award**

  Winner: Valerie Yang (*Laskey group* - Emi1 depletion in mouse embryonic stem cells induces trophoblast giant cell formation)

- **Poster Presentation Awards**

  **Oncology and Stem Cells Category Winner:** Anna Paterson (*Fitzgerald group* - Identifying key targets to allow personalised chemotherapy in oesophago-gastric cancer)

- **Academy of Medical Sciences/Medical Research Society Clinical Research Awards**

  **Oral Presentation Winner:** Chris Peters (*Fitzgerald group* - A seven gene signature outperforms clinical features at predicting survival in oesophageal adenocarcinoma)
  **Poster Presentation Winner:** Sudarshan Kadri (*Fitzgerald group* - A feasibility study of screening for Barrett’s oesophagus with a novel non-endoscopic capsule sponge device in a primary care setting)

MRC Cancer Cell Unit on Twitter

The MRC Cancer Cell Unit has entered the realms of new social media by establishing a presence on Twitter. It joins other MRC colleagues such as the press office and MRC Technology in using Twitter to communicate with a new audience about our activities and achievements. Twitter has many millions of users across the globe who are able to send and receive 140 character tweets. It is being increasingly used by a range of organisations including government, funders and research-intensive institutions to distribute information and share knowledge. As well as the MRC, CRUK, the Wellcome Trust, Cambridge University, the American Association for Cancer Research, Nature Publishing Group and Science Minister Lord Drayson can all be found on Twitter.

If you’d like to follow the MRC Cancer Cell Unit on Twitter visit: [http://twitter.com/MRC_CCU](http://twitter.com/MRC_CCU)
Rebecca Fitzgerald delivers Lister Research Prize Lecture

Following on from her award of a Lister Research Prize Fellowship in 2008, MRC CCU group leader Rebecca Fitzgerald delivered her prize lecture in July along with fellow winner Dr Simon Bullock from the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology. The Lister Institute of Preventative Medicine awards four Research Prize Fellowships each year, with winners awarded £200,000 to support their research activities.

A brief presentation ceremony and reception followed Rebecca’s talk on ‘The role of biomarkers to guide prognosis and therapy of oesophageal adenocarcinoma’.

Arrivals and departures

We are delighted to welcome graduate students Katherine Bird and Susanne Flach (Edwards), Kevin Cheng (Philpott), Hallie Kuhn and Jennifer Burrows (Coleman), Liam Cassidy, Jamie Stokes, and Yuko Takeda (Venkitaraman), and Johnny Ong (Fitzgerald). We are also pleased to welcome visiting scientists Geeta Mukherjee (Coleman), Sarah Perrett (Itzhaki) and Ahmed Ahmed (Laskey), and researchers Yaara Ofir-Rosenfeld (Venkitaraman), Stephen McLaughlin (Itzhaki) and Claire Pike (Edwards) to the Hutch.

We say goodbye to David Sequera (Itzhaki), Nabieh Ayoub (Venkitaraman), Xiao Zhang (Coleman), Yoshinori Takei (Laskey), and Vignesh Venkataraman (Venkitaraman) and wish them every success in their future careers.

Hutchison/MRC Research Centre Annual Retreat- save the date

The Hutchison/MRC Research Centre Annual Retreat will take place on Thursday 10th December at the Wellcome Trust Conference Centre, Hinxton. Further details will appear on the Hutch intranet when available.
Hutch Post-Doc Society update

The Hutch Post-Doc Society kept up their social programme over the summer with a barbeque held jointly with the Hutch Graduate Student Society in the grounds of Darwin College. Despite some unseasonal weather the event attracted a good turn out and provided an opportunity for all researchers to enjoy some time out of the lab.

After discovering what great chefs the post-docs are, the Society will also be repeating (by popular demand) their ‘bring a dish’ lunch on Friday 30th October.

And following on from the great response to the career workshop questionnaire that was recently circulated, the Society intends to hold regular lunchtime workshop covering the most popular career choice topics with a specialist in these areas.

Details of all these events will be available from the Hutch intranet: http://www1.hutchison-mrc.cam.ac.uk/Postdocs/postdocs.html

Photos by Mark Preston and Maxim Tsytlonok.
Hutch scientists in the media

**Rebecca Fitzgerald** appeared on BBC Radio 4’s Case Notes in July. The programme focussed on Barrett’s oesophagus, its treatment and the risk of developing oesophageal cancer. Presenter Mark Porter also tested the new sponge/capsule screening device developed by the Fitzgerald group. The programme can still currently be heard via the BBC iplayer on the Case Notes website [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006th1n](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006th1n).

Rebecca’s research and the BEST clinical trial for the sponge/capsule are also discussed in an article in The Times by Mark Porter.

**Ron Laskey**’s award of a Royal Medal by the Royal Society appeared in the news sections of many organisations websites including the MRC, CRUK and the Academy of Medical Sciences.

**Ashok Venkitaraman**’s publication on new insights into how BRCA2 functions during DNA repair appeared on the MRC website as a webstory in July [www.mrc.ac.uk/Newspublications/News/MRC006223](http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Newspublications/News/MRC006223).

The MRC Annual Review spotlights the work of both **Nick Coleman** and **Phil Jones**. See [www.mrc.ac.uk/Ourresearch/Dayofdiscovery/index.htm](http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Ourresearch/Dayofdiscovery/index.htm) for further details.
Recent publications


Unlocking the molecular archive: the emerging use of formalin-fixed paraffin-embedded tissue for biomarker research in urological cancer. Gnanapragasam VJ. BJU Int. 2009 Jun 10. [Epub ahead of print]


