

victorian clinical genetics services

For the past 40 years, we have delivered a high quality genetic service that has provided expert genetic diagnosis, counselling and support to Victorians.

Victorian Clinical Genetics Services (VCGS) has been a highly sought-after centre for the training of geneticists, genetic counsellors and scientists, and a provider of genetic education to health care workers. The laboratories of VCGS Pathology have provided a range of specialised services including newborn screening, metabolic tests, maternal serum screening, and chromosome and molecular testing. The close interaction between clinical and laboratory services has enabled the introduction of new technologies and the effective translation of research into clinical practice.

CHANGES TO CANCER SERVICES

From a clinical perspective, 2009 was a year of considerable change for familial cancer services in Victoria. Since the discovery in the mid 1990s of genes that predispose for breast cancer and bowel cancer, VCGS has played a central role in the development and delivery of familial cancer services. In 2009 the Victorian Cancer Action Plan was implemented, a component of which was the transfer of family cancer clinics from VCGS to Familial Cancer Centres housed within adult public hospitals. It was disappointing to see some of our valued clinical staff transferred to the Family Cancer Centres, however,

it was also gratifying to reflect on the great contribution made by VCGS to the establishment of familial cancer services across Victoria. The loss of a number of VCGS staff also impacted on our capacity to provide other general genetic services, leading to a reduction in the number of clinics at some sites, however, the quality of service delivery was never compromised.

I commend our staff for their professionalism in managing the change and this period of uncertainty.

VCGS Director
Professor Agnes Bankier



1. PhD scholar and medical scientist Steven Nasioulas 2. Dr James Pitt & A/Professor David Amor 3. Genetic counsellor Lisette Curnow with daughter Sasha

line test for patients with intellectual disability and multiple congenital abnormalities. Our VCGS pilot study, as well as several other European and American studies, have shown that molecular karyotyping detects more than five times as many chromosome abnormalities than conventional chromosome analysis. Such is the power of molecular karyotyping that more than 20 new syndromes have recently been described in the literature, and more are expected. Interpretation of molecular karyotype results is a difficult and very important aspect of performing the test, and VCGS scientists and clinicians have specific expertise and experience in this area.

RECOGNISING THE VALUE OF VCGS

Over the past decade, public funding of genetic services has not kept pace with the growing requirements for service delivery. This funding gap was brought into focus in 2009 by increasing costs of employment. In late 2009, a governance and financial review of VCGS was undertaken by the Murdoch Childrens Board. This review concluded that VCGS adds considerable value to the Institute's research. Moreover, the VCGS model of service delivery has unique advantages to the people of Victoria, provided that it can be financially secured. We are working hard internally and with the Victorian Government to ensure VCGS remains the cornerstone of genetic health service provision in this state.

KEY STAFF CHANGES IN 2009

There has been a change of key staff within VCGS. Laurie Cox retired from the VCGS Board, and Brent Dankesreither has taken over from Anne Cronin as Chief Operating Officer. We thank Laurie and Anne for their enormous contribution. I have stepped aside from my role as Director and welcome my successor A/Professor David Amor. I have every confidence David, with the support of Brent and Terry Dwyer, will lead us to a bright new future.

It has been a privilege to lead such a talented and dedicated group over the past decade. My sincere thanks for their support through this challenging year and every good wish for the next chapter.

Professor Agnes Bankier
Director, VCGS

LAB DEVELOPMENTS

VCGS laboratories continued to make great advances in translational research with the introduction of new genetic tests and continued delivery of unique services to the people of Victoria, Tasmania and nationally. Of particular significance, the VCGS Cytogenetic Laboratory played a key national and international role in the development of molecular karyotyping, a new form of chromosome analysis that collects up to 2.7 million pieces of genetic information from each patient. Molecular karyotyping represents the most significant advance in chromosome testing in the last 30 years, and has rapidly become best practice as the first