

## **2010 RCPA Media Awards – Winners Announced Today**

The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA) has announced the winners of its fifth annual media awards for excellence in journalism relating to pathology, at the opening of its annual Pathology Update Conference, being held this weekend in Melbourne.

The RCPA seeks to recognise journalists who best represent the essential role of pathology in medicine, in stories that illustrate the breadth, depth or importance of Pathology to the wider community.

This year's submissions covered such issues as the crucial role Pathology plays in patient care, and the potential impact on health outcomes for the community of government decisions on how pathology services are provided.

Judges were impressed by the depth of coverage and the difficult issues tackled by Kirrilly Burton, Medical News Journalist at Medical Observer, in her piece entitled 'Who Owns Your Genes?', and by Karen Brown, Health Correspondent at Radio NZ for her Insight documentary 'Testing Time'.

Kirrilly Burton was honoured for her two-part series which highlighted issues around whether Australian patent laws should be changed to prevent commercial monopolies of human genes. The series, which ran on 27 November 2009, looked at Australia's current patent system, which is currently under scrutiny as it presently allows companies or organisations to patent genetic sequences, allowing a potential monopoly on access to the genetic test - thus blocking access to life-saving medical research.

Karen Brown was recognised for her documentary, broadcast on 5 April 2009, which discussed the pros and cons of what is seen as the biggest change in laboratory services yet attempted anywhere: the switch in provider of all community laboratory testing in Auckland, New Zealand.

'Testing Time' looked at all aspects of the switch, from the background, to the effects on lab staff and the industry, challenges now facing the new provider, and wider community risks inherent in the move.

The winners were announced at the RCPA's Annual Pathology Update Conference, and were presented with a \$2000 first prize each for their portrayal of issues in Pathology.

The CEO of the RCPA, Dr Debra Graves says although pathology is the basis of medicine, it is generally not well understood, by either the public or the politicians who have such influence over its delivery.

"Kirrilly's two-part series explored the issues inherent in the gene patent debate, and gave a sound background to help readers understand the significance of the pending outcome of the Senate Community Affairs Committee inquiry into gene patents," says Dr Graves.

"Karen's documentary discussed the central importance of diagnostic testing to any health system, and considered the flow-on effects of a decision that appeared not to be made with an understanding this crucial role."

“In both pieces, the journalists confidently and knowledgably tackled issues that are crucial for the future of patient care in both Australia and New Zealand.

Past winners of the Awards have included Julie Robotham (Sydney Morning Herald), Jill Margo (Australian Financial Review), Adam Cresswell (The Australian), Sophie Scott (ABC TV), Janelle Miles (Courier Mail), Martin Johnston (New Zealand Herald), Gabrielle Boyle (Network Ten), Louise Hall (Sun Herald) and Jodi Yeats (NZ Doctor).

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