



PathWay

THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PATHOLOGISTS OF AUSTRALASIA



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ISSUE #099

IN THIS ISSUE

- Stopping the spread of coronavirus
- Tackling ovarian cancer
- Pathology Update overview
- Pathology Update speaker spotlight

INTERESTING FACTS

45%

the five-year survival rate for ovarian cancer^[2]

1,510

the estimated number of new cases of ovarian cancer in Australia each year^[3]. In New Zealand, it is around 300.^[4]

37

The current number of countries outside of China that have had confirmed cases of coronavirus.^[5]

23

The number of confirmed

Welcome to the February issue of ePathWay

ePathway is an e-magazine designed for anyone interested in their health and wellbeing and the integral role pathology plays in the diagnosis, treatment and management of diseases.

This month's issue of *ePathway* looks at the following:

- Stopping the spread of coronavirus
- Tackling ovarian cancer
- Pathology Update overview
- Pathology Update speaker spotlight

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Stopping the spread of coronavirus

cases of coronavirus in Australia.^[6]

Source:

[2] <https://www.cancer.org.au/about-cancer/types-of-cancer/ovarian-cancer.html>

[3] <https://canceraustralia.gov.au/publications-and-resources/position-statements/testing-ovarian-cancer-asymptomatic-women/background>

[4] <https://cancernz.org.nz/assets/Uploads/Quarian-Cancer-Awareness-Information-Sheet-9F-ID-22737.pdf>

[5] https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200226-sitrep-37-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=6126c0a4_2

[6] https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200226-sitrep-37-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=6126c0a4_2



Countries around the world are stepping up their efforts to tackle a new strain of coronavirus which had not previously been detected in humans, now officially called SARS-CoV-2. We spoke to NSW Health Pathology's infectious disease specialist and medical virologist, Professor William Rawlinson to understand how the virus spreads and what we can do to reduce transmission.

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PREVIOUS EDITIONS

Tackling ovarian cancer

Ovarian cancer has a five-year survival rate of just 45%^[1], and whilst early detection remains key to higher survival rates, we currently have no screening tests that can identify early ovarian cancers in the general population reliably enough to make a difference. To tie in with Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month, we spoke to Deborah Smith, Anatomical Pathologist at Mater Pathology to find out more.



**OVARIAN
CANCER
AWARENESS**

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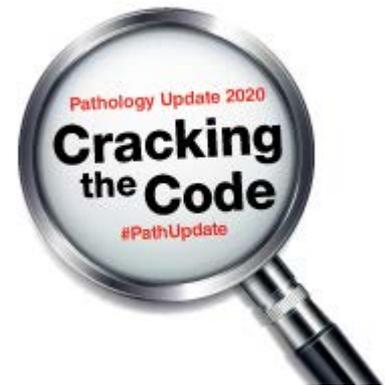
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Pathology Update overview

Pathology Update is the annual scientific educational meeting for the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA). It is the only conference of its kind in Australasia, bringing together pathology professionals from the eight different disciplines of pathology. We spoke to Chair of the Overseeing Committee, A/Prof Trishe Leong to learn more about this year's Pathology Update which takes place from 20 – 22 March at ICC Sydney.



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Pathology Update speaker spotlight

This year, Pathology Update 2020 is proud to be hosting 139 Australasian speakers and ten international speakers, all experts in their field. We shine a spotlight on Professor Bobbi Pritt (as pictured) who is attending the conference from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, USA, and Professor Edwin Kirk, one of the three co-leads of the Mackenzie's Mission project.



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Stopping the spread of Coronavirus



Coronavirus has been making headlines since the outbreak was first reported in China's Wuhan city in December 2019. With countries around the world stepping up their efforts to tackle the new virus, we spoke to NSW Health Pathology's infectious disease specialist and medical virologist, Professor William Rawlinson to learn more.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses found in both animals and humans. Some of these viruses infect people and are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. The new, or "novel" coronavirus, now officially called SARS-CoV-2, causing the illness known as COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease, 2019), had not previously been detected before this current outbreak was reported ^[1].

"What is concerning is that this is a new virus and we do not know what changes the virus may undergo. So far, we have seen that COVID-19 spreads like a respiratory virus and is almost certainly spread from animals. We know that the virus can also be spread from human-to-human, and this ability has been key to further transmission of infection. Since this particular coronavirus has some different characteristics to viruses our immune system has encountered before, it is able to cause more generalised and, in this case, more severe infections than we usually see with this type of virus," said Prof Rawlinson.

Given that emergence of COVID-19 was so recent, the understanding of transmission patterns, severity, clinical features and risk factors for infection remains limited ^[2]. The most [recent situation report](#) released by the World Health Organisation (26 February

2020) shows that the virus has been confirmed in 37 countries outside China^[3]. Reducing transmission of virus has therefore been an important factor in tackling the outbreak.

“It is very important to reduce transmission of the virus. If you can delay the spread of the outbreak, then the virus tends to fall in numbers. The best way to do this is by preventing travel, by avoiding contact with high risk groups at any given time, and by controlling movement of cruise ships and aircraft between countries. We have had a small number of cases here in Australia – 23 so far – and the public health control intervention has been very effective in preventing the spread. We are finding that people are being very responsible – which is very positive – and we all need to continue to do so,” said Prof Rawlinson.

Human-to-human transmission is believed to occur mainly through droplets and symptoms range from a mild cough and a runny nose to pneumonia. There is currently no treatment for COVID-19 and a small number of the total of infected people get sick very quickly. Whilst this is the case and there have been a number of deaths reported, it is important to note that most people do recover easily.

“We believe there are a lot of people who have been infected with COVID-19 and are recovering. We are hoping that the overall mortality rate will be lower than the 2% that we think currently. To give some comparison, the mortality rate for the SARS outbreak was around 9%. Those people who are experiencing symptoms, especially those who have had appropriate exposure, either having been to China or having been in contact with someone who has had the COVID-19 infection, should get tested.”

“If someone thinks they are at any risk then they should call their GP and put themselves into self-isolation until testing and appropriate discussion with their Doctor. The public health unit would be notified, and the individual can be tested for complications such as pneumonia which is the major complication we are seeing currently. The patient would be monitored, and their test would need to be negative before they are able to come out of isolation. Testing is taking place at appropriate labs throughout Australia and New Zealand and is likely to become more widely available over the coming months,” said Prof Rawlinson.

If anyone is concerned that they may have contracted coronavirus, they should call the Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080 or 0800 358 5453 (New Zealand) for more information on how to proceed.

References:

[1] <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>

[2] https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200226-sitrep-37-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=6126c0a4_2

[3] https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200226-sitrep-37-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=6126c0a4_2

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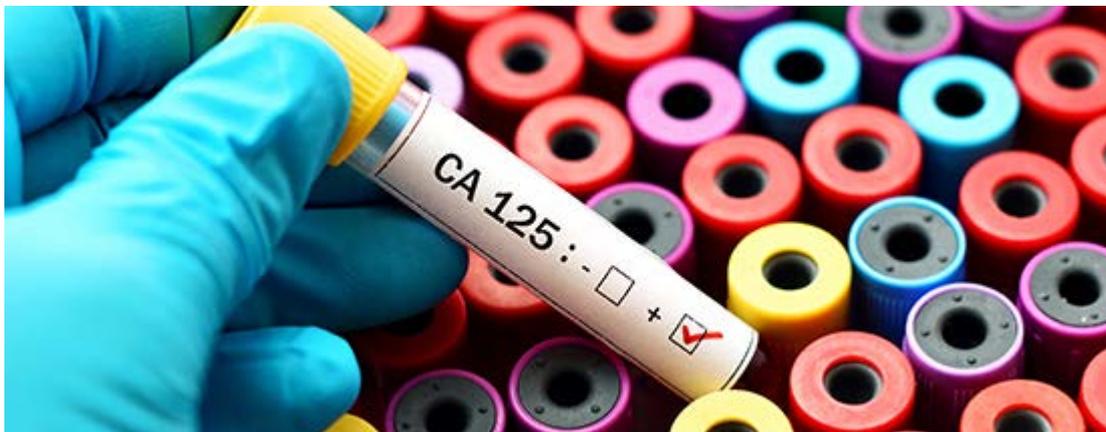
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Ovarian Cancer



February is Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month and is held each year in Australia to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer, to highlight the risk factors, and to educate Australians on ovarian cancer diagnosis and treatment. We spoke to Deborah Smith, Anatomical Pathologist at Mater Pathology to discuss this cancer which has a five-year survival rate of just 45% ^[1].

“It is estimated that around 1,510 new cases of ovarian cancer are diagnosed in Australia each year and around 300 are diagnosed in New Zealand. Whilst it is not as common as some other cancers, the death rate from ovarian cancer is high – more than 1,000 in Australia and over 200 in New Zealand each year, making it the fifth leading cause of cancer death in women,” said Dr Smith.

Ovarian cancer is the term used to describe malignant tumours which start in one or both ovaries. There are several types of tumours, including epithelial which are the most common and make up 90% of ovarian cancers; germ cell, which are rare and account for 5% of ovarian cancers; and stromal cell and other rare types. Ovarian cancer is mainly diagnosed in women over the age of 50, with the average age being around 64, however there are cases that are diagnosed in younger women ^[2].

“Because the symptoms of ovarian cancers are non-specific, it has often spread outside the ovary in many women by the time of diagnosis. Common symptoms include increased abdominal size or bloating, some lower abdominal pain, needing to urinate more often, and a sensation of being full after eating only a small amount. Other things include feeling very tired, a change in bowel habits to either constipation or diarrhoea and weight changes,” said Dr Smith.

Initial investigations include simple tests such as a pelvic ultrasound and Ca125 blood tests. If there is anything concerning, additional scans are likely to be undertaken, plus referral to a gynaecologist or gynae-oncology team (depending on local circumstances). A tissue or fluid specimen is needed to make a definite diagnosis; sometimes this can be sampled under radiological guidance as an outpatient, but in other cases the entire ovary needs to be removed surgically for examination. Pathology is essential as it provides a definite diagnosis which guides treatment decisions, provides information about how far the tumour has spread, and can identify any specific treatment targets.

A combination of surgery and chemotherapy remains the most common method of treatment, sometimes with radiotherapy. It is important to note there are currently many ongoing research trials investigating methods for early detection of ovarian cancer, more effective chemotherapy combinations and more personalised treatment regimes for patients.

“There are a number of trials going on at the moment, including drugs which activate the woman’s own immune system to recognise tumour cells as foreign and kill them. Promising trials are also looking at identifying more specific and sensitive cancer markers in blood tests to try and find better screening options, and to establish whether simple drugs like aspirin can prevent ovarian cancer developing.”

“Early detection remains key to higher survival rates, but we currently have no screening tests that can identify early ovarian cancers in the general population reliably enough to make a difference. What we need is to develop a simple non-invasive method of testing and capturing those patients with early stage disease, as treatment at an early stage is more effective. We also need to develop more personalised and effective treatments for ovarian cancers which have already spread,” said Dr Smith.

References:

[1] <https://www.cancer.org.au/about-cancer/types-of-cancer/ovarian-cancer.html>

[2] <https://ovariancancer.net.au/about-ovarian-cancer/>

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Pathology Update - the largest Australasian multi-disciplinary scientific conference



Pathology Update is the annual scientific educational meeting for the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA). It is the only conference of its kind in Australasia, bringing together pathology professionals from the eight different disciplines of pathology. We spoke to Chair of the Overseeing Committee, A/Prof Trishe Leong to learn more about this year's Pathology Update which takes place from 20 – 22 March at ICC Sydney.

“Pathology Update 2020 is almost upon us and we are excited to welcome internationally renowned pathologists from around the world to present in their field in Sydney next month. The annual three-day conference has grown each year since its launch in 2013 and can now be considered the most significant Australasian educational meeting for pathologists.

“This year's event is a complex conference and attendees can expect to discover eight core discipline program streams, combined sessions, workshops, 139 local and interstate speakers, 10 international speakers, and over 45 program chairs and program committees. Most of all, those delegates attending the conference will have the opportunity to listen to innovative and insightful presentations which they may not otherwise hear,” said A/Prof Leong.

Ongoing education of fellows, trainees and scientists is necessary to ensure current best practice and to fulfil professional requirements for continual practice improvement through the CPDP program of the College. During the conference, members of different diagnostic disciplines and from all the states and territories of Australia as well as New

Zealand and other South East Asian countries will meet to discuss the latest, and most useful diagnostic processes. During the three day conference, trainees are also granted fellowship to the College during a special evening convocation event.

This year, Pathology Update 2020 expects to welcome over 1370 delegates from across the world, including from Australia, New Zealand, Europe, China, Singapore and many others. One particular conference highlight is international speaker. Prof Sir Munir Pirmohamed who will present on Personalised Medicine: Current opportunities and challenges. During his presentation, Prof Sir Pirmohamed will discuss how personalised medicine approaches are now possible because of advances in genomics, other omics technology and big data approaches.

“What’s more, we are absolutely thrilled that we have 68 medical and science students already registered to attend this years’ conference. Plus, thanks to the Pathology Update Education Outreach Grant, we have pathologists from Fiji, PNG, Bhutan and Indonesia attending. We are also astounded by the number of posters that have been submitted to be part of the Roche Scientific Poster Display. We have 242 to choose from, with the winners of each major pathology scientific discipline taking home AU\$500 each thanks to Roche. Pathology Update 2020 is on track to be the best yet!” said A/Prof Leong.

In addition to working towards being a sustainable paperless conference, each year Pathology Update selects a charity of choice. This year, in collaboration with major partner Roche, Pathology Update 2020 is proud to be supporting So Brave. As Australia's Young Women's Breast Cancer Charity, So Brave is the voice for young women in Australia through Advocacy, Fundraising, Financial Sustainability, Research, Education and Brand.

Pathology Update 2020 will take place from Friday 20 – Sunday 22 March at the International Convention Centre, Sydney.

Online registration is open at: <https://www.rcpa.edu.au/Events/Pathology-Update>

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Pathology Update speaker spotlight



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All the way from Minnesota, USA, Prof Bobbi Pritt will present in the Innovations Plenary and in the Anatomical Pathology and Microbiology scientific streams. Prof Pritt is Professor of Clinical Microbiology within the Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, USA, and holds a joint appointment in the Division of the Infectious Diseases. Her primary areas of interest are clinical parasitology, vector-borne diseases, infectious diseases pathology, and medical education. Prof Pritt is also the author of the popular international parasitology case blog *Creepy Dreadful Wonderful Parasites*.

Prof Pritt's research focuses on the development and use of novel molecular amplification and sequencing assays for diagnosis of human parasitic and vector-borne diseases, and she has published more than 130 articles, including descriptions of two new tick-borne human pathogens in the United States, and has authored four books and 14 book chapters. During her presentations, Prof Pritt will cover a variety of common parasites and mimics, including those encountered in Australia and other resource-rich countries. Prof Pritt will also review the key diagnostic features of worms and their mimics, and how they can be recognised by anatomic pathologists and microbiologists alike.

Closer to home, UNSW's Professor Edwin Kirk will join delegates at the conference to provide an update on the unprecedented Mackenzie's Mission project. The project was announced as part of the May 2018 Budget when the Australian Government allocated \$20 million to a research study of reproductive genetic carrier screening for severe and life-limiting genetic conditions including SMA, fragile X syndrome and cystic fibrosis.

Prof Kirk is part of a team of UNSW researchers which are playing a leading role in the project which will screen 10,000 couples for 1,300 genes associated with >700 conditions. The project will study uptake, proportion of couples found to be at high risk, reproductive decisions made by those couples and psychosocial, health economic, ethics and implementation research related to carrier screening. At the launch of the project, it was expected that couples in Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales would be able to take part in the study from early 2020. Prof Kirk's presentation will describe the origins and structure of the project, with a focus on the process of selecting the genes included in the screen and lessons learned from the first three months of screening.

Pathology Update 2020 will be held Friday 20 – Sunday 22 March at the International Convention Centre, Sydney. The final Program is now live at <https://www.rcpa.edu.au/Events/Pathology-Update/Final-Program>

The Pathology Update 2020 app will go live on Monday 16 March, helping delegates to stay on top of everything across our huge three-day event. In the app you'll find the full scientific program by discipline, speaker profiles, workshop info, venue maps, as well as the full social event calendar.

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- What lies beneath your Christmas dinner
- Who guides the surgeon's hand
- The risks of over-diagnosing Community Acquired Pneumonia

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