

Forum on complementary medicine and reproductive health

Jo Rayner

Mother and Child Health Research (MCHR) recently held a one-day forum entitled *Women's use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in reproductive health: Identifying the gaps in the evidence, exchanging ideas, and establishing research collaborations*. My purpose in organising and convening the forum was to bring together an invited group of key public health and CAM researchers, health professionals and CAM practitioners to discuss what is currently known about women's use of complementary medicine in reproductive health, to consider the development of a network of researchers in the field and to discuss potential research collaborations and sources of funding.

Eighteen interstate and local public health researchers and CAM practitioners attended the forum, all with the common interest of increasing the profile of public health CAM research. The forum was structured to include morning presentations highlighting past and current CAM projects undertaken by staff and students at MCHR and a guest speaker – Associate Professor Jon Adams, School of Population Health, University of Queensland – who outlined women's health and use of CAM from a public health/health services research perspective.

WE HAVE MOVED

MCHR's new home is 215 Franklin Street, Melbourne
See page 4 for details.

MCHR research presented included projects undertaken by Della Forster with clinical colleagues examining women's use of herbal medicines¹ and vitamins² in pregnancy. I presented work undertaken in collaboration with colleagues at MCHR, the Universities of Melbourne and Tasmania and CAM practitioners, exploring women's use of CAM to enhance fertility.^{3,4,5} These projects have contributed to the development of an NHMRC project grant application submitted for funding in 2011 which aims to describe use of CAM for fertility enhancement and pregnancy outcomes among Australian women of childbearing age who have been pregnant or tried to conceive. Mary-Ann Davey also presented work being developed, exploring the possibility of a trial of acupuncture to reduce the proportion of women who require induction of labour for post-maturity.

In the afternoon, the group discussed issues related to CAM use and public health research. This included such questions as:

- what are the implications of increased CAM use on consumer spending, clinical outcomes, industry regulation, education of CAM practitioners and policy development?
- what is the impact of regulation of CAM? How do we regulate when there is so much difference between types of modalities (e.g. acupuncture) in terms of practices, claims and outcomes?
- what are the issues for education (national curricula) and achieving consistency of standards regarding CAM practitioners and practices?

- what has been done in the USA – the links between public health, clinical studies and mechanistic studies, and improving incorporation of evidence?

Following this, three groups discussed research interests, gaps in evidence, and possibilities for collaboration and funding opportunities in relation to fertility enhancement, labour and birthing and women's health. The day concluded with a commitment from participants to establish and maintain electronic communication, to meet again and to establish a reproductive health special interest group listed on the Network of Researchers in the Public Health of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NORPHCAM) website.

1. Forster D, Denning A, Willis G, Bolger M, McCarthy E. Herbal medicine use during pregnancy in a group of Australian women. *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth* 2006;6:21.
2. Forster D, Wills G, Denning A, Bolger M. The use of folic acid and other vitamins before and during pregnancy in a group of women in Melbourne, Australia. *Midwifery* 2009;25:134-146.
3. Rayner J, McLachlan H, Forster D, Cramer R. Australian women's use of complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) to enhance fertility: exploring the experiences of women and practitioners. *BMC Complement Altern Med* 2009;9:52.
4. Rayner J, Forster D, McLachlan H, Kealy M, Pirota M. Women's use of complementary medicine to enhance fertility: the views of fertility specialists in Victoria, Australia [Letter]. *Aust N Z J Obstet Gynaecol* 2010;50:305.
5. Rayner J, Willis K, Burgess R. Women's use of complementary and alternative medicine for fertility enhancement: A review of the literature. *J Altern Complement Med* (In Press).



Forum participants Professors Charlie Xue and Vivian Lin with convenor Jo Rayner and guest speaker Jon Adams.

Breastfeeding: under the pump

Helene Johns

When my children were young I was responsible for breast pump hire through my local Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) group. As an ABA breastfeeding counsellor and a midwife I noted the apparent trend towards increasing numbers of women hiring breast pumps and doing so for extended periods of time.

There is also anecdotal evidence that the number of women leaving hospital not feeding directly from the breast has increased, and that more women are going home doing a combination of expressing and feeding breast milk, in addition to feeding from the breast. The reasons for these phenomena are not well understood and discussion with professional colleagues

culminated in the development of the Mothers and Infants Lactation Cohort (MILC).

MILC is a prospective cohort study exploring whether infants fed solely at the breast in the 24 hours before postnatal discharge are more likely than other infants to be breastfeeding at three and six months. One thousand postpartum women are being recruited from the Royal Women's Hospital, Mercy Hospital for Women and Frances Perry House. Data being collected include: breastfeeding at hospital discharge, and at three and six months postpartum, exclusive breastfeeding duration, expressing outcomes, breastfeeding confidence and satisfaction and maternal mental health.

Recruitment for the study commenced in mid 2009 and 670 women have been recruited thus far. Given my longstanding interest in breastfeeding, I enrolled as a PhD student on the MILC study at MCHR in early 2010. The opportunity to be involved in initial interviews and follow-up has been fascinating and learning more about research is challenging and rewarding.

MILC team

Della Forster,^{1,2} Helene Johns,^{1,2} Lisa Amir¹, Helen McLachlan,^{1,3} Anita Moorhead,² Kerry McEgan,⁴ Rachael Ford,^{1,2} Chris Scott⁵

1. Mother and Child Health Research, La Trobe University
2. Royal Women's Hospital
3. Division of Nursing and Midwifery, La Trobe University
4. Mercy Hospital for Women
5. Frances Perry House

Helene Johns



Breastfeeding in Victoria: A report

Lisa Amir

The Australian Government recently released the National Breastfeeding Strategy which aims to increase the proportion of infants who are fully breastfed from birth to six months of age, and who continue breastfeeding with the introduction of complementary foods beyond 12 months. In response to the National Breastfeeding Strategy, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) Victoria, is developing the Victorian Breastfeeding Action Plan. In early 2010, staff at Mother and Child Health Research (MCHR) were invited to contribute to the action plan.

Lisa Amir, Della Forster, Helen McLachlan and Heather McKay from MCHR, worked with Catherine Chamberlain (Southern Health) and Anita Moorhead (Royal Women's Hospital) on this project. The aims of *Breastfeeding in Victoria: A Report* were to:

- review existing literature in order to identify evidence-based interventions that might be suitable for implementation and evaluation in the Victorian context to improve the initiation and maintenance of breastfeeding;

- identify and document breastfeeding support services operating in Victoria; and
- use the results of the literature review and consultation process to recommend interventions that could be implemented and evaluated in Victoria to increase breastfeeding.

A systematic literature review was conducted to update the findings of a 2005 review conducted by Della Forster.¹ Current breastfeeding support services were documented using a consultation process comprising informal interviews with relevant key stakeholders and an online survey of maternal and child health nurses (MCHNs) in Victoria. Intervention options were developed and submitted to DEECD (separately from the publically available report).

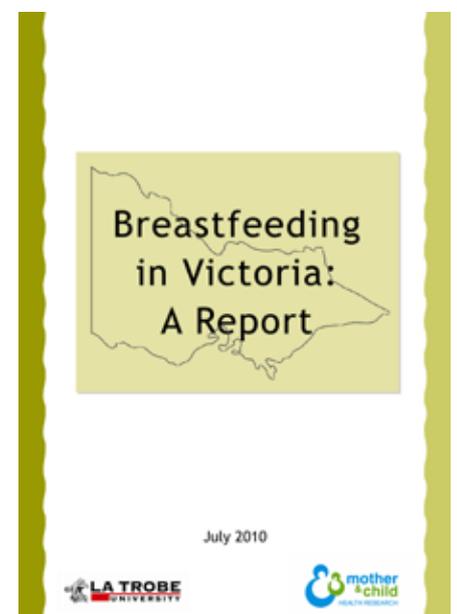
MCHNs collect data on breastfeeding at routine time points. The data are useful in comparing infant feeding in local government areas and over time, but have limitations when comparing data with other datasets. A number of key recommendations about the monitoring of breastfeeding in Victoria were also made in the report, that:

- breastfeeding data be collected at each of the key ages and stages (KAS) appointments;
- in addition, prior to the KAS visits, MCHNs record infant feeding (as reported by the mother) in the 24 hour period prior to each of the scheduled visits;

- data concerning exclusive breastfeeding be reported at four, not six, months; and
- the maternal and child health service annual reports (state-wide and for each region) add another item to the reporting of breastfeeding – *any breastfeeding*; i.e. any being the combination of *fully breastfed* and *partially breastfed*.

Website for report: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/childyouth/breastfeeding/default.htm>

1. Forster DA. Breastfeeding – making a difference: predictors, women's views and results from a randomised controlled trial. Unpublished PhD thesis, La Trobe University, Bundoora, 2005.



Women and use of the ECP

Melissa Hobbs

Since the rescheduling of the emergency contraceptive pill (ECP) to over-the-counter (OTC) status in Australia in January 2004, there has been little information about women's use of the ECP. This study aimed to assess knowledge, socio-demographic patterns of use and barriers to use of the ECP, levonorgestrel. This was my PhD study¹ and was part of a larger research project which explored the knowledge, attitudes and practices of both women and pharmacists in relation to the rescheduling of the ECP in Australia. The main findings from both women and pharmacists have now been published.²⁻³

Six focus groups with 29 women from four Australian states were conducted to explore knowledge of, attitudes towards, access to and experiences of using the ECP.⁴ The information obtained from these focus groups informed the development of a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) survey which was conducted between May and August 2008 with a national random sample of 632 Australian women aged 16-35 years. Multiple logistic

regression analysis was used to examine factors associated with use of the ECP.

Most women had heard of the ECP and 26% had used it. About a third (32%) erroneously believed the ECP to be an abortion pill, and a significant number of them (58%) confused it with the 'abortion pill' mifepristone (RU-486). The most common reason for not using the ECP was that women did not think they were at risk of getting pregnant (57%). The majority of women (72%) agreed with OTC availability of the ECP, however we were surprised to find that fewer than half (48%) were aware that it was already available from a pharmacy without a prescription, revealing a critical barrier to its use. Fewer than half the women agreed it was the pharmacist's role to give contraceptive (47%) and STI advice (49%) to women obtaining the ECP at the pharmacy. Women more likely to use the ECP were aged 25-35 years, not married (in a de facto relationship, in a relationship but not living with the partner or single) had good knowledge about the ECP and believed OTC availability was a positive step.

Based on these findings, more information and education about the ECP's mechanism of action, safety, side-effects and availability from pharmacists without prescription is required for women. Basic information should include the risk of

pregnancy and clarification that the ECP is not medical abortion.

1. Hobbs MK. The emergency contraceptive pill (ECP) rescheduled: knowledge, attitudes and experiences of women in Australia. Unpublished PhD thesis, La Trobe University, Bundoora, 2010.
2. Hobbs MK, Taft AJ, Amir LH, Stewart K, Shelley JM, Smith AM, Chapman CB, Hussaini SY. Pharmacy access to the emergency contraceptive pill: a national survey of a random sample of Australian women. *Contraception* (In Press).
3. Hussaini SY, Stewart K, Chapman CB, Taft AJ, Amir LH, Hobbs MK, Shelley JM, Smith AM. Provision of the emergency contraceptive pill without prescription: attitudes and practices of pharmacists in Australia. *Contraception* (In Press).
4. Hobbs M, Taft AJ, Amir LH. The emergency contraceptive pill rescheduled: a focus group study of women's knowledge, attitudes and experiences. *J Fam Plann Reprod Health Care* 2009;35:87-91.

Melissa Hobbs



Postgraduate students update

Lisa Amir

Della Forster and I currently share the position of postgraduate co-ordinator at MCHR. The postgraduate group meets monthly to learn from each other and from other researchers, from within and outside MCHR. We'd like to share some news about new postgraduate students.

We congratulate **Miranda Buck** on receiving a Dean's scholarship to undertake a PhD at MCHR. This scholarship includes one day a week teaching in the first year Health Sciences course. Miranda is a paediatric nurse and currently a lecturer at RMIT. I am supervising Miranda's project that will investigate women's experiences of breastfeeding problems.

We have several students who are enrolled elsewhere, and are being co-supervised at MCHR. **Mimmie Claudine Ngum Chi**, who was born in Cameroon, has lived and worked in South Africa prior to migrating to Australia. Mimmie has a nursing

degree and a Masters of Public Health (Melbourne) and is a lecturer at Victoria University. The title of Mimmie's PhD is "Contraception, teenage pregnancy and culture issues among African girls with a refugee background in greater Melbourne". Her principal Supervisor is Dr Celia McMichael at La Trobe Refugee Research Centre. Angela Taft at MCHR and Dr Charles Mphande from Victoria University are co-supervisors.

Zaharah Sulaiman is an international student enrolled in her PhD in the School of Public Health, La Trobe University. A doctor, she is also a lecturer at the Women's Health Development Unit, School of Medical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). Her PhD project is entitled "Infant feeding choices: Attitudes, decision-making processes and experiences among working women in Malaysia". Professor Pranee Liamputtong and I are her supervisors.

Zaharah Sulaiman



Mimmie Claudine Ngum Chi



Miranda Buck



Staff News

Congratulations to **Angela Taft** who has been appointed to a three-year Associate Professor position at MCHR. Angela will continue to lead major programs of research on intimate partner violence and on sexual and reproductive health and will also take up the role as Deputy Director at MCHR.

We welcome back **Ruby Walter**, MOVE project co-ordinator, from maternity leave and say farewell to **Catina Adams** who has returned to work as the maternal and child health nurse team leader with the City of Hume.

Mridula Bandyopadhyay has been invited as an expert to join in the Child Health and Nutrition Knowledge Network, the latest initiative of the Child Health and Nutrition Research Initiative, an international foundation with the vision to improve child health and nutrition of all children in low and middle income countries through research that informs health policy and practice.

Farewell to **Melanie Callander** who has worked in administration at MCHR for almost three years. We wish her well in her new position, closer to home, at Deakin University.

MCHR's new home

At the beginning of November MCHR vacated the temporary building we had inhabited in Little Lonsdale Street for the last four years, and made the long-awaited move to La Trobe University's Franklin Street Campus at 215 Franklin Street, Melbourne – just a couple of city blocks away.

The Franklin Street Campus is opposite the Queen Victoria Market, near the roundabout at the corner of Queen and Franklin Streets, just a block up from Elizabeth Street (see map). You can find us on the recently refurbished Level 3 of 215 Franklin Street. Thankfully, our telephone numbers have remained the same.

We are very much enjoying settling into our permanent home and also our co-location with the Australian Research Centre for Sex, Health and Society (Level 2) and with staff from the School of Public Health (also on Level 3).



NHMRC Project grants success

A team led by **Della Forster** received a \$491,321 NHMRC project grant in the latest funding round. The study, 'Diabetes and antenatal milk expressing (DAME): a randomised controlled trial', will explore the practice whereby women with diabetes in pregnancy are encouraged to express breast milk before their baby is born. This is a relatively common and increasing practice for which there is no evidence of efficacy or safety. The study is a collaborative project between MCHR (**Della Forster** and **Lisa Amir**), the Royal Women's Hospital (Sue Jacobs, Peter Davis, Anita Moorhead, Rachael Ford, and Amanda Aylward), Mercy Hospital for Women (Kerri McEgan, Susan Walker, Gillian Opie and Cath McNamara) and MCRI (Susan Donath).

Della Forster is also an investigator on another NHMRC funded project grant entitled 'Asking QUESTions about Alcohol in pregnancy (AQUA): fetal effects of exposure to low and moderate doses of alcohol', led by Jane Halliday from the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute.

Kelsey Hegarty, Jane Gunn, **Angela Taft**, Gene Feder, Ann Taket and Stephanie Brown have been awarded an NHMRC Project Grant of \$277,190 for their project Women's Evaluation of Abuse and Violence Care Randomised Controlled Trial: long-term outcomes.

Recent Publications

Armstrong S, Small R. The paradox of screening: rural women's views on screening for postnatal depression. *BMC Public Health* 2010 (In Press).

Bandyopadhyay M. Domestic goddesses; maternity, globalisation and middle-class identity in contemporary India. *Cult Health Sex* 2010;12:973-975.

Kealy MA, Small RE, Liamputtong P. Recovery after caesarean birth: a qualitative study of women's accounts in Victoria, Australia. *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth* 2010;10:47.

McDonald K, Kirkman M. HIV-positive women in Australia explain their use and non-use of antiretroviral therapy in preventing mother-to-child transmission. *AIDS Care* 2010 (In Press).

McDonald K, Slavin S. My body, my life, my choice: practices and meanings of complementary and alternative medicine among a sample of Australian people living with HIV/AIDS and their practitioners. *AIDS Care* 2010; 22:1229-1235.

Watson L, Rayner J, King J, Jolley D, Forster D, Lumley J. Modelling prior reproductive history to improve prediction of risk for very preterm birth. *Paediatr Perinat Epidemiol* 2010;24:402-415

Watson L, Rayner J, King J, Jolley D, Forster D, Lumley J. Modelling sequence of prior pregnancies on subsequent risk for very preterm birth. *Paediatr Perinat Epidemiol* 2010;24:416-423.

The *International Breastfeeding Journal*, edited by Lisa Amir, has published a thematic series on prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV in

October 2010. The series of ten papers highlights the major public health dilemma following the various WHO infant feeding guidelines that have been issued over the last two decades.

La Trobe University's Franklin Street Campus at 215 Franklin Street, Melbourne. MCHR is on level 3.



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