

Issue 1 | March 2006

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Welcome *CMVH LAUNCHES 'ForeFront'*

Welcome to the first external newsletter of the Centre for Military and Veterans' Health.

We hope through the newsletter to keep all partners and stakeholders up to date with the progress CMVH is making in leading developments of innovative solutions in the field of health, wellbeing and human performance for the Australian Defence Force and veteran communities through research, education and promotion.

As the first newsletter, this edition

includes information on the history and structure of the CMVH as well as its major programs and strategic directions. Future editions will keep you up to date with projects and people.

If you have a special interest in any aspect of our program explore our website www.uq.edu.au/cmvh/ or contact the appropriate person listed on the back page for more information.

CMVH Investigates Submarine Hazard Claims

The Department of Defence recently recruited CMVH (through its Brisbane and Adelaide nodes) to investigate the types of hazards that may be onboard the Oberon Class HMA Submarines. Oberon Class Submarines were used by the Royal Australian Navy between 1967 and 2000.

Current and former submariners have lodged compensation claims with the Department of Veterans' Affairs claiming exposure to hazards onboard the vessel.

However, since the hazards were not recognised when the submarines were in service, the claims have not been readily accepted. An authoritative study to document known hazards will assist the decision-making process for the compensation claims.

A research survey has been conducted through a collaboration between The University of Adelaide (UA) and The

University of Queensland (UQ) to retrospectively identify known hazards of the Oberon Class HMA Submarine and, where possible, estimate exposures and risk of harm.

The occupational hygiene survey is being lead by Associate Professor Dino Pisaniello (UA) and Commander Sonya Bennett (UQ). The study includes:

- a literature review
- focus groups of submariners who worked on the submarines
- walk-through inspections

CMVH presented a final report to the Department of Defence in early March.

About CMVH

The Centre for Military and Veterans' Health (CMVH) is an internationally-unique, academic, community and military partnership dedicated to innovatively seeking solutions to military and veterans' health issues through research, education, e-health and public debate.

It is a collaboration of three major partners, The University of Queensland, The University of Adelaide and Charles Darwin University.

CMVH brings together military and veterans' health experts - researchers, health practitioners and serving ADF personnel and Reservists - who, through their combined talent, expertise and experience, seek to better understand and propose practical solutions to the health issues facing Australia's serving and former military men and women.

The Centre actively works towards a healthier future for Defence personnel and veterans through best practice information sharing, innovative and inclusive research, strong and meaningful dialogue with ex-service organisations and veterans generally.

The Centre has five key operational units or 'pillars':

- **e-Health** - focusing on health care delivery systems for veterans and serving personnel through the application of state-of-the-art technology in an integrated e-Health environment
- **Think Tank** - CMVH is a primary facilitator of debate on military and veterans' health issues, both in the Australian context and also internationally
- **Research** - an interest in health and human performance is focused on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Defence service personnel, and complements Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) research. The Deployment Health Surveillance Unit (DHSU) provides the vehicle for researching the impact of deployments on ADF personnel
- **Professional Development** - CMVH is Australia's pre-eminent centre for post-graduate and professional development qualifications for health practitioners working with former and serving military personnel. The Centre offers a Master of Public Health (Defence) program for those practitioners providing health services to Defence and DVA
- **CMVH Business Support Unit** - representing CMVH's administrative functions

Director's Message

2006 will be a year of capitalising on our potential.

With an organisation as complex as ours - three universities, and then some, our communications will be vital - hence this newsletter.



Feedback is welcome: issues you would like us to include, people you think we should add to the mailing list, the format, or other comments should be sent to B.Ware@uq.edu.au.

Major early achievements for CMVH included:

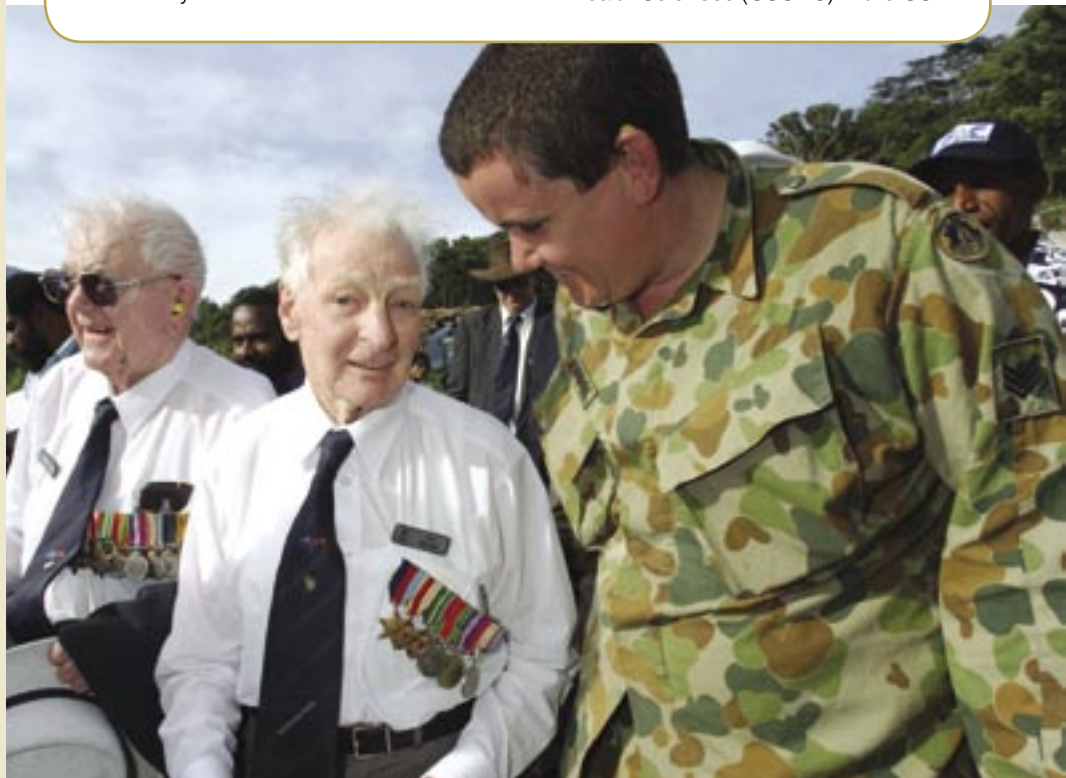
- Establishing an MPH (Defence) and an occupational and environmental health short course
- Initiating the Deployment Health Surveillance Program (DHSP)
- Determining a focus for e-Health across the Defence and Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) interface
- Establishing the node at The University of Adelaide and the foundations for a relationship at Charles Darwin University
- Locating academics from a wide variety of disciplines in the three universities who wish to work on military and veterans' health issues

- Fostering collaborative relationships with the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences in the USA and Royal Centre for Defence Medicine in the UK

- Developing a communication plan

CMVH pillars are just completing business planning for this year, based on the overarching strategic plan we developed last year. Priorities for 2006 which are emerging are:

- **Deployment Health Surveillance Program (DHSP)** - keeping pace with a significant agenda of work set by Defence and DVA and formalising international collaboration
- **e-Health** - turning strategy into action
- **Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), applied research** - substantially adding to Australia's OHS research capacity by developing a new program of interventional research across The University of Adelaide (UA) and The University of Queensland (UQ)
- **Health workforce innovation** - developing new models of care in response to workforce shortages
- **Disaster management** - working closely with Charles Darwin University and potentially in partnership with the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences (USUHS) in the USA



First Step in Deployment Health Surveillance

Context

Since 1999 the Australian Government has conducted formal health reviews of all overseas Defence deployments. The Defence Health Services (DHS) was established as part of the reviews and in particular the Deployment Health Surveillance Program (DHSP) which aims to detect emerging veterans' health issues and generate data which allow investigation of identified research questions.

Traditionally post-deployment health studies have been retrospective in that health issues were either raised from veterans' concerns or were hypotheses generated in descriptive studies of veterans' health. This approach had limitations and a prospective capability is expected to offer a range of benefits including better information on exposures, evaluation of current preventive practices, improved timeliness of benefits to veterans and better quality reporting to community and Government on post-deployment health.

The goal of the Defence Health Surveillance Program is to collect data from Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel prior to overseas deployment, on return and at regular intervals after returning.

Project Implementation

DHS first aims to develop tools and processes to collect valid health outcome and exposure data. To do this, four retrospective studies of recent overseas deployments are currently being conducted by the Deployment Health Surveillance Unit (DHSU) within CMVH. The projects - InterFET (International Forces East Timor), Solomon Islands, Bougainville and East Timor - are at different stages of implementation and each will build and expand on methodologies of the previous project.

The first project, the InterFET pilot project, began in late December. Initial project outlines have been approved and detailed research plans are currently being developed for the other three projects. There will be similar exposure and health outcomes in all projects but each will be tailored to include concerns specific to each deployment.

The InterFET Pilot

The pilot project's first stage involved collating information on occupational and environmental exposures experienced on this deployment. The next stage involved identifying deaths among those on the InterFET Nominal Roll from the National Death Index.

The following stage will involve collecting data from the Defence Health records and sending a questionnaire to a random sample of 100 InterFET veterans and 100 Defence personnel who were serving at the same time as InterFET but were not deployed. The questionnaire will cover personnel's personal history, Defence service including deployments, and health and well-being.

Project Staffing and Scientific Support

Leadership of DHSU projects is being provided by A/Prof Scott Kitchener, A/Prof Cate D'Este and Dr Adrian Barnett, with assistance from Suzanne Delaney and Dr Ben Stute. Overall project management will be undertaken by Dr Christine McClintock and with assistance from the University of Adelaide for the Bougainville Project. Logistic support and quality assurance assistance will be provided by the Research Coordination Unit led by CMDR Sonya Bennett.

The University of Queensland and The University of Adelaide, led by Professor Annette Dobson, will initiate the Scientific Research Team (SRT) to provide scientific review of the projects. The Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) was established by DHS to ensure projects are designed and carried out according to accepted scientific standards. This committee will be chaired by Professor Tony McMichael from the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University.

Veterans' input will be coordinated by an advisory groups currently being established.

Thinking About Think Tanks

CMVH has conducted two Think Tanks on deployment health and one on e-Health since October 2004.

All three have been very different and now CMVH proposes to review these experiences and propose a way ahead for this component of work.

Some of the issues being explored include:

- What are we trying to achieve with the Think Tanks?
- What has been successful practice elsewhere?
- How should we fund the Think Tanks?
- Is there potential for our Think Tanks to reach broader audiences?

Pillar head Tracy Carthew is preparing a paper on the previous Think Tanks which describes their development process, invitees, attendees, event activities, outputs and degree of success. An external consultant will undertake the actual review with a preliminary issues paper being presented to the Board in March. A final report is due in May.

Next Think Tank

The next Think Tank will be based on Medical Health Ethics. Two submissions for this Think Tank from external agencies have already been made and a Steering Committee has been formed.

CMVH's History

Late 1990's

Need for an academic centre to support the discipline of military medicine identified in ADF

1999

Proposal for the funding of a Centre for Military and Veterans' Health (CMVH) through a collaboration between Defence and Department of Veteran's Affairs endorsed by Federal Ministers

2002

The University of Queensland with The University of Adelaide and Menzies School of Health Research (later Charles Darwin University - Darwin) successfully tender to host and operate CMVH

Early 2003

Implementation Plan developed and approved

4 February 2004

CMVH operations commence

6 April 2004

Official Opening of Centre by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Hon Danna Vale MP, and the Minister for Employment Services and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence Hon Mal Brough MP

Adelaide Update

Occupational and Environmental Health Course

The Intensive Occupational and Environmental Health Course has now been run twice with excellent feedback from the students. In response to post course surveys, we are endeavoring to increase the military component.

Planning is underway for the 2006 course. The dates will be 14-29 August, and it will be held at the Institute of Aviation Medicine, RAAF Base Edinburgh once again. The On-line OEH course commences at the end of February. Both of these courses are the equivalent of two points towards the MPH (Defence).

Study Opportunities

The post graduate courses for nurses available at The University of Adelaide have been advertised. High quality distance learning packages and opportunities for clinical experience are available. CMVH Adelaide also offers students wishing to complete a PhD a range of topics and assistance in securing an appropriate supervisor. Currently five PhD students are working directly on military based projects.

Research

The Oberon Class Submarine Occupational Hygiene Survey has been completed through Department of Public Health, The University of Adelaide AND CMVH UQ.

Darwin Update

Charles Darwin University (CDU) is the newest member of the CMVH consortium, as it now incorporates the Menzies School of Health Research (MSHR) within its Institute of Advanced Studies. The MSHR is recognised as an Australian leader in Indigenous, tropical and remote health research and as an innovative centre or public health training and research education.

CDU has a well-developed capacity for health services research through

both MSHR and the Graduate School for Health Practice which has potential application to CMVH's health workforce innovation project.

Priority areas for CMVH and Defence for which CDU offers expertise include a specialist capability in disaster response, especially the education of public health practitioners, and heat stress research (in partnership with the National Heat Training and Acclimatisation Centre and the Northern Territory Institute of Sport).

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