

## RDM Newsletter

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December 2018

Dear all,

Welcome to final edition of the RDM newsletter for 2018. I would like to start by welcoming all our new DPhil students to the department. I hope that you enjoy your time here in Oxford. The University is a wonderful place to pursue your academic careers and we wish you every success – at both an academic and personal level.

We have had a number of outstanding achievements over the last few months. In particular, I would like to congratulate the 2018 Graduate Prize Winners: Christopher Booth, Evangelos Oikonomou and Marieke Oudelaar. They have done, and will continue to do, stellar work and we look forward to their future careers with much interest. You can read more about their successes in this newsletter.

This term we also celebrated the award of the formal title to eight new Full and Associate Professors and University Research Lecturers to the department. These new titles recognise the substantial research achievements of these scientists, as well as their teaching and 'good citizenship' both within RDM and beyond.

I would also like to thank each and every one of you who has contributed to Oxford Medical Sciences being ranked at the top of the Times Higher Education discipline-specific tables (in clinical, pre-clinical and health studies) for the eight consecutive year: this would not have been possible without the contribution of our researchers, students and administrative and support staff.

While I look forward to seeing the achievements of our staff members over the next year, this year also marks the retirement of two of our long-serving staff members, who have really helped shape the divisions they work within. I and Prof Stefan Neubauer write about them in more detail further in the newsletter. We owe both Phil Townsend and Jane Francis many thanks for their hard work.

Please get in touch with [Dr Charvy Narain](#) if you have any news you would like to share with the department – from fundraising and athletic feats to poster prizes and awards, we want to hear your stories.

I wish you all a wonderful break over the festive season.

With best wishes,

Hugh Watkins

# Congratulations

## Prof Rury Holman wins American Diabetes Association and 'Living Legend' awards

[Prof Rury Holman](#) (OCDEM) was only the second diabetologist to be given the '[Living Legend' award](#)' at the annual joint European Society for Cardiology (ESC) and Cardiology and Diabetes (CAD) conference, which took place in October 2018 in Mumbai, India. Prof Holman was also the recipient of the 2018 Outstanding Achievement in Clinical Diabetes Research Award, which recognises exceptional contributions to patient centred/clinical outcome research that has had a significant impact on diabetes prevention and treatment. Prof Holman had carried out landmark clinical trials for over four decades, and has been recognised as one of the top 400 biomedical researchers in the world (based on a [European Journal of Clinical Investigation](#) publication which ranked living scientists with the highest h-index). Find out more about the award and [Prof Holman's](#) work.

## Eight new Full and Associate Professors and University Research Lecturers

We are pleased to announce that we have four new full Professors, two new Associate Professors, and two new University Research Lecturers within RDM.

[Leanne Hodson](#) (OCDEM), [Adam Mead](#) (MRC MHU, MRC WIMM, NDCLS), [Damian Tyler](#) (CVM) and [Gary Ford](#) (IMD) were all awarded the title of full Professor in this term's Recognition of Distinction exercise. They now hold the following titles: Leanne is Professor of Metabolic Physiology, Adam Mead is Professor of Haematology, Damian Tyler is Professor of Physiological Metabolism, and Gary Ford is Professor of Stroke Medicine.

[Katja Gehmlich](#) (CVM) is now Associate Professor of Cardiovascular Science, and [Simon Stanworth](#) (NDCLS) is Associate Professor of Haematology and Transfusion Medicine.

The title of University Research Lecturer has been awarded to [Adam Lewandowski](#) (CVM) and [David Sims](#) (MRC WIMM, NDCLS).

All of these titles are awarded in recognition of substantial independent research achievements, contributions to teaching and to the general academic life of the Medical Sciences Division, and the department itself.

## Spinout launch for Prof Charalambos Antoniades' work



Research by [Prof Charalambos Antoniades](#) (CVM), which utilises novel approaches to analyse standard computerised tomography (CT) scans to flag patients at risk of deadly heart attacks, has now been commercialised into a new spinout company, [Caristo Diagnostics](#).

The spinout, fostered by [Oxford University Innovation](#), is based on British Heart Foundation funded research which identified that the fat tissue surrounding coronary arteries can sense the presence of inflammation in those arteries. This change can be detected by analysing routine coronary CT angiograms using Caristo's proprietary technology, producing a new measure called the fat attenuation index.

Prof Antoniades' work was also featured in the University of Oxford [Artificial Intelligence showcase](#), and he was awarded the 'Research Fellow of the Year' prize at the 2018 British Cardiovascular Society conference.

## Prof Leanne Hodson delivers 2018 Starling Medal lecture



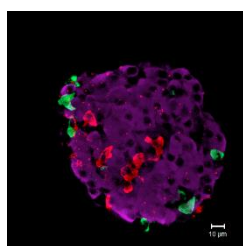
[Prof Leanne Hodson](#) (OCDEM) is the winner of the Society of Endocrinology's 2018 Starling Medal, which is given each year to a mid-career researcher "whose work has contributed to exceptional scientific advances in endocrinology". Prof Hodson delivered her lecture to a packed audience at the Society's 2018 conference on Monday 19 November.

## In the News

### New British Society of Haematology guidelines for babies with Down Syndrome

[Prof Paresh Vyas](#) (MRC MHU, MRC WIMM, NDCLS) was one of the researchers who co-led a team which recommended that all babies with Down Syndrome should have a blood count and blood film test in the first few days of life. This recommendation now forms part of the British Society for Haematology guidelines which were published in the [British Medical Journal](#).

### Uncovering the full story in diabetes



(Photo credit: Dr Quan Zhang)

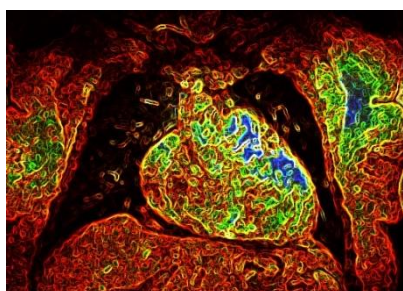
Insulin is only half the story of what goes wrong in type 2 diabetes, and a *Cell Metabolism* study published led by [Prof Patrik Rorsman](#) (OCDEM) has found that exposure to high glucose levels for as little as 48 hours can lead to changes in the secretion of glucagon, the hormone that works antagonistically to insulin. But the study, which used pancreatic islet cells (pictured) donated by patients as well as rodent models, also found that it might be possible to reverse these changes: [find out more](#).

### Lowering the blood platelet transfusion threshold can prevent major bleeding in premature babies

[Associate Prof Simon Stanworth](#) (NDCLS) co-led a study which collected data from 43 neonatal units across Europe over six years, to find that giving premature babies blood platelet transfusions only when their platelet counts fell lower, to 25 rather than 50, was actually safer: the study, published in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#), found that using this lower threshold would result in 7 fewer babies out of every 100 suffering from major bleeding, or dying. Read coverage in [The Independent](#), and read the full story on the [RDM website](#).



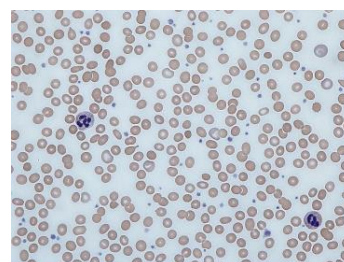
## Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy scar progression linked with heart failure and arrhythmia risk



An OCMR study conducted by Dr Betty Raman under the supervision of [Prof Stefan Neubauer](#) (CVM) and [Dr Masliza Mahmod](#) (CVM) has used advanced MRI methods to find hypertrophic myopathy patients who are most at risk of heart failure and sudden cardiac death. The study, published in the [European Heart Journal – Cardiovascular Imaging](#), tracked patients for six years to find the tell-tale signs of scar progression which make the heart weak and prone to electrical disturbances. Read the full story on the [RDM website](#).

## Controlling infection essential to tackle global anaemia

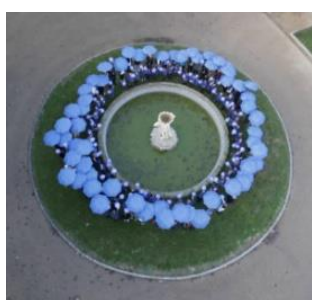
Working with his collaborators in Australia and MRC Gambia, MRC [Associate Prof Hal Drakesmith](#) (MRC HIU, MRC WIMM, IMD) published a study in the [British Medical Journal](#) that points out that iron supplementation may actually be counterproductive in countries with high infection burden, as the supplementation may increase infection susceptibility without improving anaemia (pictured is a blood sample from a patient with iron deficiency anaemia). Read more about Associate Prof Drakesmith and his colleagues' recommendation about what to do instead on the [MRC WIMM website](#).



## RDM researchers featured in University of Oxford AI showcase

[Prof Paul Leeson](#) (CVM) and [Prof Charalambos Antoniades](#) (CVM) are both interviewed in the University of Oxford AI showcase: the online showcase includes articles, interviews and videos highlighting the breadth of research involving artificial intelligence across the University. Read about Prof Leeson's spinout company, Ultromics, [which uses AI to diagnose heart disease](#), and hear him talk on episode four of the [Futuremakers](#) podcast, and hear Prof Antoniades' [interview](#) about [making healthcare smarter with AI](#).

## OCDEM researchers mark World Diabetes Day



Led by Associate Prof Katherine Owen, OCDEM and NIHR BRC staff, students and patient collaborators came together to [mark World Diabetes Day](#), by recreating the blue ring symbol for World Diabetes Day around the Triton fountain in the Radcliffe Infirmary Quarter. They were joined by school children from St Andrew's C of E school in creating this living blue circle (pictured), to raise awareness about diabetes, and the important diabetes research that takes place at OCDEM.

## Congratulations to following DPhil students on passing their vivas

**Mohammad Alkhalil** worked on the 'Vascular characterisation using multimodal imaging and relationship to functional lipid indices in blood', and was supervised by Prof Robin Choudhury and Associate Prof Rajesh Kharbanda (both CVM).

**Sara Althari** worked on 'Functional annotation of variants in monogenic diabetes genes to support' and was supervised by Profs Mark McCarthy and Anna Gloyn (both OCDEM).

**Toni Baeumler** worked on 'Redirecting the cellular information flow with programmable dCas9-based chimeric receptors' and was supervised by Associate Prof Tudor Fulga (MRC WIMM, NDCLS).

**Fang Cao** worked on 'Regulation and modulation of the creatine kinase system' and was supervised by Associate Prof Craig Lygate, Prof Stefan Neubauer and Dr Servasti Zervou (all CVM).

**Yi-ling Chen** worked on 'Interaction and Immune Regulations of Innate Lymphoid Cells and Plasmacytoid Dendritic Cells in Skin Inflammatory Diseases' and was supervised by Prof Graham Ogg (MRC HIU, MRC WIMM, IMD).

**Ruth Clifford** worked on 'Evaluation of Genomic Aberrations in leukaemic and pre-leukaemic cells in Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia' and was supervised by Prof Anna Schuh (Department of Oncology, formerly NDCLS, RDM) and Dr Samantha Knight (NDM).

**Mahdieh Godazgar** worked on the 'Properties of voltage-gated Na<sup>+</sup> channels in pancreatic  $\beta$ -cells' and was supervised by Prof Patrik Rorsman, Dr Quan Zhang, and Dr Margarita Chibalina (all OCDEM).

**Lucas Greder** worked on 'Elucidating the molecular mechanisms of the endothelial to hematopoietic transition' and was supervised by Prof Marella de Bruijn (MRC MHU, MRC WIMM, NDCLS).

**Alex Hamilton** worked on 'Glucagon and Glucose Counter Regulation: Pancreatic  $\alpha$ -Cell Function and Dysfunction during Hypoglycaemia' and was supervised by Prof Patrik Rorsman and Dr Andrei Tarasov (both OCDEM).

**Elizabeth Huang** worked on 'Organisation of, and ligand-independent signalling by the TCR, with a special emphasis on the pre-TCR' and was supervised by Prof Simon Davis (MRC HIU, MRC WIMM, IMD).

**Agata Juszcak** worked on 'Assessment and translation of novel biomarkers for diagnosis of maturity onset diabetes of the young due to HNF1A variants' and was supervised by Prof Mark McCarthy and Associate Prof Katharine Owen (both OCDEM).

**Feng-Chih Kuo** worked on 'Functional evaluation of the human fat distribution HOXC13 gene locus' and was supervised by Prof Frederik Karpe and Dr Katherine Pinnick (both OCDEM).

**Lucian Purvis** worked on 'Absolute Quantification of Human *in vivo* Hepatic 31P Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy at 7 Tesla' and was supervised by Associate Prof Christopher Rodgers and Dr Ladislav Valkovic (both CVM).

**Akansha Tarun** worked on 'Hydrogen Sulfide (H<sub>2</sub>S) as a Regulator of Myocardial Redox State and the Redox-Sensitive Regulation of Cystathionine  $\gamma$ -Lyase (CSE)' and was supervised by Profs Charalambos Antoniades and Barbara Casadei (both CVM).

**Soren Thomsen** worked on 'Identifying Causal Mechanisms for Beta-Cell Dysfunction at Type 2 Diabetes Risk Loci' and was supervised by Profs Mark McCarthy and Anna Gloyn (both OCDEM).

**Kate Thomson** worked on 'Refining the genetic architecture of inherited cardiomyopathies through case-control analyses' and was supervised by Profs Martin Farrall and Hugh Watkins (both CVM).



# Prizes and awards

We're always keen to hear about your prize wins: please email [communications@rdm.ox.ac.uk](mailto:communications@rdm.ox.ac.uk) to let us know.

## RDM Graduate Prize

Congratulations to **Christopher Booth** (MRC MHU, MRC WIMM, NDCLS), **Evangelos Oikonomou** (CVM) and **Marieke Oudelaar** (MRC MHU, MRC WIMM, NDCLS) who are the winners of this year's RDM Graduate Prize.



[Chris Booth](#) completed his DPhil under the supervision of Profs Adam Mead and Sten Eirik Jacobsen (both MRC MHU, MRC WIMM, NDCLS). Chris led a study that provided experimental evidence that the phenotypic and gene expression profiles of a cancer can be traced back to those of the cell of origin. For the first time since the identification of human early thymic progenitor (ETP) leukemia, Chris confirmed that ETPs do indeed possess the potential to become leukemic stem cells (LSCs) upon introduction of recurrent ETP leukemia associated mutations. Chris published his findings in a first author article in [Cancer Cell](#) and has given oral presentations of his work at two international meetings.

[Evangelos Oikonomou](#) is in the third year of his DPhil, supervised by Prof Charalambos Antoniades (CVM) and Jemma Hopewell (NDPH). Evangelos has pioneered novel ways of detecting coronary inflammation using a novel computed tomography (CT) technology that tracks three-dimensional changes in the composition of perivascular adipose tissue. As well as being first author on a paper in the [Lancet](#), which has attracted considerable media attention, Evangelos is a co-inventor on two patents relating to the technology he has developed.



[Marieke Oudelaar](#) completed her DPhil under the supervision of Prof Doug Higgs and Associate Prof Jim Hughes (both MRC MHU, MRC WIMM, NDCLS). Her research describing chromosomal interactions within single cells has made a major contribution to recent developments in the application of Chromosome Conformation Capture techniques. Although this won't have an immediate clinical application, it will, in time have a very large impact on the field. Marieke's research is published in [Nature Genetics](#).

## Multiple wins for Dr Rina Ariga



Many congratulations to [Dr Rina Ariga](#) (CVM) for winning second prize in the Royal Society of Medicine Cardiology President's prize: Rina was awarded a £500 prize for her work on diffusion tensor cardiac magnetic resonance imaging to measure disarray in vivo in hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. Rina also won first prize and the 'People's Choice' award on the Three-Minute Thesis competition at Exeter College, Oxford, with her talk on 'Predicting risk with a heavy heart'. The Three-Minute Thesis is a nerve-racking competition between

graduate students trying to distil their DPhil research and explain it to a non-specialist audience in just three minutes. No props, no gimmicks, and disqualification if three minutes are exceeded, so well done Rina! You can listen to the talk [online](#).

In addition, Dr Ariga received the Young Investigator Award from the British Society for Cardiovascular Magnetic Resonance and the Clinical Science Prize from the Association for Inherited Cardiac Conditions. She is also a recipient of the Royal Society of Medicine Cardiology President's Prize for 2018.

### European Society of Cardiology prizes

At the 2018 ESC Congress, [Evangelos Oikonomou](#) (CVM), DPhil student with Prof Charalambos Antoniades won the Young Investigator Award in Clinical Science, while [Ioannis Akoumianakis](#) (CVM), another DPhil student within the Antoniades group, won the young investigator award in coronary pathophysiology and microcirculation. Ioannis also won the 'Best Poster' award in vascular biology at the Congress. Evangelos is also one of the winners of the RDM graduate prize. Many congratulations to both Evangelos and Ioannis.

### Best oral presentations

[Lisa Simpson](#) (CVM), a first year DPhil within Associate Prof Ellie Tzima's group (CVM) was awarded first prize for best oral presentation on the Medical Sciences Division DPhil day in July 2018.

[Liam Young](#) (CVM) won first prize for best oral presentation at the postgraduate symposium of the British Chapter of the International Society for Magnetic Resonance in Medicine. Liam's award was based on his presentation outlining the first use of an MRI compatible liver perfusion system.

Congratulations also to **Dr Kenneth Chan** (pictured second from right), an Academic Clinical Fellow who won the prize for best oral presentation at the Association for European Cardiovascular Pathology meeting in October 2018. Kenneth's talk was on microvascular rarefaction and the loss of endothelium in severe aortic stenosis, a project carried out within Dr Masliza Mahmud's group (CVM).



[Dr Kerry McLaughlin](#) (OCDEM) from Prof Patrik Rorsman's group (OCDEM) was awarded the best oral presentation prize at the 2018 'Innovators in Diabetes' meeting – this is a Diabetes UK-sponsored initiative where early career researchers in diabetes are selected to attend a three year programme aimed at supporting the next generation of researchers and clinicians. Kerry won for her talk describing her work on the newly described autoantigen tetraspanin-7 in type 1 diabetes.

Many congratulations to all the winners.

## Research funding

Don't forget to visit the '[Find Funding](#)' section of the website to learn about the support that we can provide with your grant applications. Details of all RDM internal deadlines can also be found there. For any funding related queries, please contact [Ruth McCaffrey](#) or [Kathleen Dolan](#).

### External funds

[Dr Mark Crabtree](#) (CVM) has been awarded a two year extension to his British Heart Foundation (BHF) Intermediate Basic Science Research Fellowship, for a project entitled 'Novel approaches to discover new NO-Redox signalling targets in cardiovascular disease.'

[Prof Adam Mead](#) (MRC MHU, MRC WIMM, NDCLS) has been awarded a Cancer Research UK Senior Cancer Research Fellowship for a project entitled 'Clinical utility of single cell genomics for precision medicine and biomarker/therapeutic target discovery'.

[Prof Mark McCarthy](#) (OCDEM) has received a Wellcome Trust Investigator Award for his project entitled 'Large-scale data integration to advance mechanistic inference and precision medicine in type 2 diabetes'.

[Prof Hugh Watkins](#) (CVM) has been awarded a five year programme grant by the BHF entitled 'Defining the role of the immune response in hypertrophic cardiomyopathy'.

[Prof Robin Choudhury](#) (CVM) has been awarded a three year project grant by the BHF for a project entitled 'The role of endothelial cell derived extracellular vesicles in monocyte mobilisation and activation in acute myocardial infarction'

[Associate Prof Charles Redwood](#) (CVM) has been awarded a two year project grant by the BHF for a project entitled 'Design and evaluation of novel compounds that reverse the increase in myofilament calcium affinity in hypertrophic cardiomyopathy'

[Dr Andrew Armitage](#) (MRC HIU, MRC WIMM, IMD) in the Drakesmith lab, has been awarded pump priming funding from the IMPRINT Network (supported by the Global Challenge Research Fund, the MRC, BBSRC and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) for a project entitled 'How does iron influence infant immune development? A systems immunology RCT sub-study in Bangladeshi infants'.

[Dr Svetlana Reilly](#) (CVM) and [Dr Christian Babbs](#) (MRC MHU, MRC WIMM, NDCLS) have each been awarded a year's funding from the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) Research Capability Fund.

**Dr Anna Rose** (MRC MHU, MRC WIMM, NDCLS) a postdoctoral researcher within the Gibbons group received a grant of £10,000 from the Oxfordshire Heath Services Committee to support a one year project to study the molecular mechanism and prognosis of myelodysplastic syndrome in a subset of patients who have a specific splicing factor mutation.

The Oxfordshire Health Services Research Committee also funded the following OCDEM researchers:

- **Dr Lia Anguelova** for her project on investigating pancreatic islet dysfunction in catecholamine secreting tumours.
- [Dr Niall Dempster](#) from the Tomlinson group for his project on bariatric surgery-induced changes in gut microbiota and their effects on non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.

[Prof Fredrik Karpe](#) (OCDEM), has received funding from the MRC for the PRIMORDIAL (Pregnancy Interventions in Mothers Relating to Diabetes in Asia, India and Low-income countries) study.

[Prof Paul Leeson](#) (CVM) has obtained an 18 month long Clinical Research Grant from Lantheus Medical Imaging.

[Profs Deborah Gill](#) and [Steven Hyde](#) (NDCLS) have won major grant funding from Boehringer Ingelheim.

[Dr Hanif Esmail](#) (NDCLS) has won the Royal College of Physicians James Maxwell Grant Proffit Fellowship for this project entitled 'Targeted proteomic profiling to characterize mycobacterial peptides in circulating extracellular vesicles and immune complexes in tuberculosis.'

[Dr Kezia Gaitskell](#) (NDCLS,) has been awarded a Cancer Research UK postdoctoral research bursary as well as an Academy of Medical Sciences starter grant for clinical lecturers for her pilot study on the molecular pathological epidemiology of kidney cancer in the Million Women study.



[Dr Shije Cai](#) (NDCLS) has won funding for a studentship/DPhil project from the Alan Morement Memorial Fund. The research will focus on an integrated proteomic and metabolomic approach to investigate the role of ubiquitin-specific protease 22 and its responsive pathways in cholangiocarcinoma.

## Internal funds

[Stephen Taylor](#) (MRC WIMM, NDCLS) has won a £50,000 grant from the [University of Oxford IT Innovation Challenge](#) 2019, to develop a software package which will allow researchers to use virtual reality for scientific research and public engagement.



[Dr Mehroz Ehsan](#) (CVM), from the Gehmlich group, has been awarded the 2018 [EIT Health Doctoral Transition Fellowship](#) at the Gold level, which comes with EUR 25,000 towards accelerated development of an idea in the first post-doctoral year, plus support from Oxford University Innovation for the duration of the funding.

[Dr Paul Holloway](#) (IMD) who holds a Royal Commission of 1851 Fellowship and works with Prof Alastair Buchan, has received funding from the [John Fell Fund](#) (in the 'Early Career Researcher' category) for his project entitled 'Developing a microfluidic model of the neurovascular unit for stroke research: Ischemic brain on a chip'.

[Dr Svetlana Reilly](#) (CVM) has been awarded funding from [Lab 282](#) for a project entitled 'Screening for hit compounds to maintain surface-bound calcitonin receptor localization for the therapeutic purpose of treating (but not limited to) cardiac fibrosis'.

## Medical Sciences Internal Fund ([MSIF](#)) pump priming awards were made to:

- [Dr Mariolina Salio](#) (MRC HIU, MRC WIMM, IMD) from the Cerundolo lab, for a project entitled 'Characterization of the immunological landscape in Juvenile myelomonocytic leukemia (JMML)'.
- [Dr Naveed Akbar](#) (CVM) from the Choudhury lab, for a project entitled 'Plasma Extracellular Vesicle RNA Signatures and Peripheral Blood Mononuclear Cell Transcriptomes in Acute Coronary Syndrome'.
- [Dr Huw Colin-York](#) (MRC HIU, MRC WIMM, IMD) from the Eggeling lab, for a project entitled 'Quantification of cellular mechanical forces using topological-TFM'.

[Dr Pramila Rijal](#) (MRC HIU, MRC WIMM, IMD) from the Townsend lab, has been awarded funding from the Medical and Life Sciences Technology Fund ([MLSTF](#)) for a project entitled 'Development of therapeutic monoclonal antibodies to Ebola viruses'.

[Prof Paresh Vyas](#) (MRC HIU, MRC WIMM, NDCLS) has been awarded funding by the Human Immune Discovery Initiative ([HIDI](#)) for a project entitled 'Mechanisms Regulating Immunological Control Of Acute Myeloid Leukaemia (AML) Following Allogeneic Stem Cell Transplantation (Allo-SCT)'.

This year, funding from the [Returning Carer's Fund](#) has been awarded to [Dr Catherine Garnett](#) (MRC HIU, MRC WIMM, NDCLS) in the Vyas lab.

## RDM Working Groups and Committees

Following the re-organisation of the Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Teams earlier in 2018 (details on our [website](#)), the new and updated working groups and committees have been meeting and working hard. The new working group structure is designed to strengthen bonds between the RDM divisions and increase the diversity of voices in the RDM structure: we want to identify any underrepresented groups, divisions or locations, and encourage people from those groups to join in. The groups and committees are:

- **Career Development Committee**
- **Communications**
- **Data**
- **Education**
- **Environment and Culture**
- **Graduate Studies**
- **Mentoring**
- **RDM Researcher Association**

Many thanks to everyone who contacted us about the re-organisation and those who have volunteered to join one of the working groups: the overarching RDM Self-Assessment Group (SAG) will meet quarterly to discuss progress against relevant actions, and ideas for future work.

Each working group and committee will have a presence on the RDM website which will outline the group membership, aims and rationale, and where available, we will also post minutes and agendas for each group or committee.

## Staff news

### Staffing updates

[Dr Serena Briant](#), Research Facilitator in RDM, will be returning from maternity leave at the end of January 2019.

[Dr Kathleen Dolan](#), Assistant Research Facilitator in RDM and maternity cover for Serena, will stay on in RDM when Serena returns providing support with research funding, career development and other relevant areas.

[Dr Ruth McCaffrey](#), Research Strategy Coordinator in RDM, will be partly seconded to cover Leila Whitworth's maternity leave. Leila is Head of the Research Strategy and Funding Team in the Medical Sciences Divisional office. Ruth will be working in RDM on Mondays and Wednesday (2 days instead of her usual 4 days) during the period of her secondment.

[Dr Bob Mahoney](#), Graduate Studies Administrator for RDM, will be moving to a new post within the MPLS Division at the University of Oxford. Many thanks to Bob for six years of his service at RDM, and we wish him the very best for his new role.

### Retirement

Retirement of a member of staff might not ordinarily make the newsletter; but, in the case of Phil Townsend, things are different. This is partly because of length of service - Phil joined the Department of Cardiovascular Medicine in 1997 - but also because there can be few who have made such a contribution and become so indispensable. When I first met Phil, it was because he had cloned and mapped the gene encoding human cardiac troponin T, and I then learnt that he was lab manager for Sir Magdi Yacoub. Two good reasons to recruit him to help set up my research group in Oxford! Phil oversaw the development of our laboratories, first in the IMM, then in the Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics, and thereafter in the West Wing. Over the years he has fixed our lab equipment and our computers, trained countless students and postdocs in laboratory techniques, and gently kept everybody on the straight and narrow. He's not just been the 'go to person' for all things technical, but I believe he has also shaped the culture and ethos of cardiovascular medicine division. It has been a pleasure to me to know that I can always rely on his judgement and common sense (and his forbearance with my IT incompetence).

Phil's resilience and good humour in the face of serious illness have been remarkable, though unsurprising; truly an inspiration to all of us. It is true to his character for Phil to want to step away quietly, but the personal debt felt by so many means that we'll have to find some way of marking his

retirement at the end of December. In the meanwhile, I know that all who know him will join me with a sincere 'thank you'.

- **Hugh Watkins, Head of Department**



In addition to Phil Townsend, this term also marks the retirement of Jane Francis, Head of Imaging Applications and Chief Radiographer in OCMR, CVM. Joining us at the very start of OCMR in 2002, Jane has been an essential part of our team and has helped to oversee many milestones, such as safely delivering over 50,000 cardiovascular magnetic resonance scans over the past 17 years, multiple MRI system upgrades, the addition of a new floor to the building, and transformation of the basement into the new Prisma scanning suite.

Jane has guided so many research projects and taught so many students, postdocs and radiographers how to scan, it would be impossible to count them, and many have since then gone on to set up and lead their own CMR centres around the world.

In short, OCMR would not be where we are today without Jane, her competence and her characteristic determination to get things done, always following her motto: "Don't make a fuss".

Jane also had many achievements of her own, such as the first Radiographer Member of the Society for Cardiovascular Magnetic Resonance Board of Trustees, Founding member of their Technology section, chair of the Technologist programme committee, etc. She was also heavily involved in various roles in the International Society for Magnetic Resonance in Medicine. Jane has won research prizes, and co-authored countless book chapters, manuscripts and conference abstracts. This year, she was elected Fellow of the Society of Cardiovascular Magnetic Resonance, the first radiographer in the world to hold this title.

Jane has had a remarkable career as the world's most experienced CMR radiographer, and we owe her a great deal of debt. Dear Jane, from all of us, a big thank you for all the wisdom, help, support and fun over the last 17 years. We hope you will enjoy a long and happy retirement with your husband, children, grandchildren and horses! And finally, "Breathe in, breathe out, stop breathing. BREATHE NORMALLY!"

- **Stefan Neubauer, Head of CVM and Clinical Director of OCMR**

## Public Engagement with Research

### RDM researchers at Oxford IF

Over two weekends, RDM researchers talked about their work to visitors of all ages at Oxford IF (formerly the Oxfordshire Science festival): MRC WIMM researchers gave visitors a taste of genome editing with a chance to 'edit' sick cells in bone marrow, and their virtual reality tour of craniosynostosis (a serious skull condition restricting brain growth) was a big hit (pictured). The following weekend, OCDEM researchers sorted fact from fiction when it came to food science, while the MRC WIMM blood factory was on hand with visitors getting the chance to play the role of immune cells detecting and fighting an infection.



A local Oxford school is currently looking for hands-on activities for primary school children for their science day on **Friday March 15<sup>th</sup> 2019**, so if you've got ideas for hands-on activities for a younger audience and want to try them out, please do get in touch with [charvy.narain@rdm.ox.ac.uk](mailto:charvy.narain@rdm.ox.ac.uk).