It has been an eventful year, globally, nationally and locally. As well as the dramas being played out on the world stage, we have had an unsettling recent period in domestic politics. Against this uncertain backdrop of course, science goes on. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have played a role in maintaining the momentum of our cutting-edge research and world-renowned teaching. It is fitting that Oxford was awarded a Gold medal in the government’s inaugural Teaching Excellence Framework exercise.

During times of profound change, it is useful to take a step back and reflect on what is happening. This is part of the reason behind today’s inaugural ‘NDCN Annual Address’. It is a chance for us to get together and hear from the heads of our five divisions about recent successes, ongoing work and future plans. I hope that you find the presentations informative and inspiring, and that they help to make you feel part of something pretty amazing, whether you have been involved in a major scientific breakthrough; are part of a team painstakingly progressing long-term routine lab work; or contribute by lending your professional support in an administrative capacity. I look forward to sharing with you additional plans and changes for NDCN too.

In particular I’d like to highlight those who have been successful with grant and fellowship applications as well as winning various kinds of prizes. You can find out more about them on pages 2-3 of this newsletter. Please take time to congratulate them and perhaps have a chat over a drink at today’s summer party.

In NDCN we know how important it is to cultivate an environment in which people can succeed. This is why we have inaugurated a tailor-made rolling annual Staff Development Plan. There is more about this and various other resources on page 4. Do take time to engage with this via the weekly newsletter and Workplace; the Staff Development Committee (led by Katja Wiech) is putting a great deal of time and thought into this, and it is a very valuable resource for anyone working in the Department.

Congratulations to all involved in Brain Diaries, which has won a Building Capacity Award in this year’s Vice-Chancellor’s Public Engagement with Research Awards. Do go (and take your children) if you’ve not already. I know many of you are also going to be involved in Curiosity Carnival, Oxford’s contribution to European Researchers’ Night on 29 September (www.ox.ac.uk/curiosity-carnival). The programme of events looks fantastic and I hope many colleagues, friends, and family will be able to attend, in order to learn about and celebrate some of the incredible research going on across Oxford.

Public engagement is an essential part of NDCN’s work, and I’m very pleased to announce that it will be taken forward in earnest by a revamped Public Engagement and Communications Committee chaired by Holly Bridge. Jacqueline Pumphrey has moved out of the Admin Team and into the Head of Department’s Office, where she will continue to promote the work of NDCN as well as taking on more responsibility for the coordination of public engagement across the Department.
Awards & Fellowships - Congratulations

Pedro Rodriguez Cruz, Lucy Matthews, Ana Cavey, Maylin Oppenheimer, Peter Rothwell and Jacqueline Palace were highly commended for their paper ‘Time- and Region-Specific Season of Birth Effects in Multiple Sclerosis in the United Kingdom’ in the MS Society Awards 2017.


The Wellcome Trust have renewed Masud Husain’s Principal Research Fellowship, for the investigation of memory and motivation in healthy people and patients with neurodegenerative conditions.

Alastair Webb has received a Wellcome Clinical Research Career Development Fellowship which begins on 1 August. He works with Peter Rothwell in the Centre for the Prevention of Stroke and Dementia.

Katie Warnaby has recently received two awards: the National Institute of Academic Anaesthesia 2017 Research Award, presented by Dr Liam Brennan, President of the Royal College of Anaesthetists, and the Mapleson Medal, awarded by the Anaesthetic Research Society for the best presentation at the British Journal of Anaesthesia Research Forum.

Vice-Chancellor’s Public Engagement with Research Awards

Oxford Neuroscience and Oxford University Museum of Natural History have won a Building Capacity Award in this year’s Vice-Chancellor’s Public Engagement with Research Awards, which celebrate public engagement work across the University. The announcement was made at an awards ceremony on 28 June hosted by Vice-Chancellor Professor Louise Richardson.

The award was given for the Museum of Natural History exhibition, Brain Diaries, developed in partnership with Oxford Neuroscience, and accompanied by a public event programme and online digital resources. Many NDCN staff were involved.

Claire Sexton, formerly of NDCN and now in the Department of Psychiatry, won an Early Career Researcher award for public engagement relating to her research investigating factors proposed to promote healthy ageing in the brain.
Members of NDCN were successful in two categories of these awards, which celebrate the digital at the University of Oxford.

Nicola Barclay, Sumathi Sekaran, Simon Kyle, Colin Espie, and Christopher-James Harvey (along with Damion Young from the Medical Sciences Division) were joint runners up for ‘The Oxford Online Programme in Sleep Medicine’ in the category ‘Innovative teaching and learning with technology’. The judges felt that the programme was a very well thought-through approach to the problem of spare-time professional learning, demonstrating commitment to supporting students and taking their feedback into consideration.

Holly Bridge and Jacqueline Pumphrey were runners up for their contribution to ‘Brain Diaries’ in the public engagement category – along with museum staff Ellena Smith and Scott Billings, as well as researchers Kate Nation and Zoltan Molnar. The judges particularly commended the team’s approach to using digital technologies to engage the public with the research being profiled, and to how they might enable a much broader reach through the new format website.

Hilary Edgcombe got an honourable mention for her work on the LIFE project, also in the public engagement category – along with colleagues Chris Paton, Mike English, Niall Winters, Anne Geniets and Jakob Rossner. The LIFE team has created a mobile game in which learners work through a specific scenario in a 3-D virtual hospital. The judges praised this dramatic use of virtual reality to build a valuable learning resource for its intended audience.
Staff Development in NDCN

NDCN supports the professional development and individual career ambitions of all our staff by providing access to the training and mentoring necessary to succeed. To this end, the Staff Development Committee, chaired by Katja Wiech, has created a year-long departmental Staff Development Plan.

The Plan is organised around 12 monthly themes and provides targeted resources, events, and support in these areas. New online content is added each month to the Staff Development pages on the NDCN intranet: https://sharepoint.nexus.ox.ac.uk/staff-development

The theme of the first month (May 2017) was Grant Writing. In an interactive workshop, Professor Irene Tracey, Professor Masud Husain, and Professor Heidi Johansen-Berg shared their expert advice and insights. You can find the video of the session on the intranet, alongside our custom-made Idea Builder tool to hone your idea, advice on writing an application including checklists, and interviews with senior staff about their grant writing experiences.

More resources are available on the NDCN website: www.ndcn.ox.ac.uk/about/staff-development

Check out the new Researchers’ Toolkit:
www.medsci.ox.ac.uk/resources
An interview with Katja Wiech

Jacqueline Pumphrey interviews Katja Wiech, Associate Professor and Chair of NDCN’s Staff Development Committee.

Katja Wiech started to train as a clinical psychologist in Düsseldorf. Not long into her course, she began to get frustrated that there seemed to be no deep enough understanding of the brain mechanisms behind the conditions they were learning how to treat, such as depression and anxiety. She happened to meet someone involved in brain imaging studies, and found this empirical approach so fascinating that she left her original course, enrolling on a PhD programme at the University of Tübingen.

It is not surprising, then, that her research interests sit at the nexus between psychology and neuroscience. She is interested in how the beliefs that we hold influence how we experience pain; how the psychological can have an incontrovertible impact on perception. Going further, Katja would like to know more about how we form our beliefs – and why, even when we are faced with evidence to the contrary, there are some beliefs that we stubbornly refuse to relinquish.

Behind this rather philosophical question lies a more scientific one: can your brain process evidence that contradicts your beliefs? And if it can, are there some instances where it might process the evidence but not follow it up – and if so, why? Katja is motivated by a desire to see the bigger picture. Rather than sticking to conventional therapeutic approaches that try to aggressively target people’s ‘wrong’ perceptions about how painful something is, she would like to know whether these beliefs are somehow still useful for the individuals concerned. The brain is constantly having to evaluate sensory input and consequences, and Katja is trying to get to the bottom of how the brain integrates its many and varied goals. For example, it may be painful for you to walk, but if you don’t go out you won’t see your friends, so you make a judgement between two competing goals.

Katja believes that scientists will eventually work out the exact nature of the interface between perception and the brain’s cognitive system. We can observe that there is some kind of interaction, but we have yet to come up with models that capture the complexity of this interaction and explain how it happens.

The ultimate impact of this kind of research would be a more detailed and nuanced understanding of how people form beliefs, what good reasons they may have for maintaining them, and what kind of evidence they may need in order to let them go. In Katja’s words, ‘where does the brain go when you provide evidence?’ Such understanding could lead to much more targeted treatment for individuals experiencing pain.

People who have inspired Katja in her career include not only many innovative neuroscientists but also those from other disciplines who have dared to ‘think outside the box’ to challenge the prevailing dogmas of their field.

Katja has recruited two scientists with an interest in computational modelling to her group: Ben Crittenden and Ondrej Zika. Their aim is to generate models from behavioural data to inform the analysis of brain imaging data. For example, in an ongoing study they look at the question of why pain-related associations are so easy to learn but very difficult to forget. The modelling of data such as response times and decision accuracies in a decision-making task helps them to understand the difficulties people have when they learn what causes them pain – and what doesn’t. Combining this approach with brain imaging then allows them to understand the mechanisms that lead to faulty learning, with the hope that these mechanisms will at some point be targets of new treatment options.

As well as her immediate group, Katja works with Irene Tracey and the neuroimaging community, and with behavioural psychologists who are interested in the perceptual process in a clinical setting. She also spends time with physiotherapists and massage therapists, looking at the translation of her findings into clinical practice. In fact, she says that here in Oxford you often find the expertise you need sitting in the room next door – a testament to the advantages of being based in a multidisciplinary department such as NDCN.

Staff development is high on Katja’s agenda because, as she says, we spend a lot of time at work! It is important to her that people find work satisfying and can reach their potential. The working environment should bring out what people are good at, and help them improve what they’re not so good at. She hopes that NDCN’s Staff Development Committee, which she chairs, will ultimately help people to ‘carve out their own profile’ as a person with interests inside and outside the Department.

When she’s not at work, Katja enjoys being with her ten-year-old son. Both like to spend as much time as possible outdoors. She is also a devotee of yoga and has just got back into running.

See www.ndcn.ox.ac.uk/research/pain-mind

www.ndcn.ox.ac.uk
Group in Focus: Breathe Oxford

Breathlessness can be extremely unpleasant and difficult to treat. For many people, despite medication, breathlessness remains a problem.

The Breathe Oxford research group, led by Kyle Pattinson, investigates how the brain generates the feeling of being breathless, and how it is affected by stress, mood and previous experience. The group uses functional magnetic resonance imaging of the brain, in combination with detailed measures of physiology and psychology. They plan to use their findings to discover, design and test new personalised treatments for breathlessness.

One of their current research projects is looking in particular at the neuroscience of asthma. Asthma affects 1 in 11 people in the UK. Recent major advances have shown that there are different types of asthma that can be treated in different ways. By better understanding how the brain is involved in asthma we will eventually be able to design new treatments for asthma. These could particularly help people whose asthma is not completely controlled by currently available medicines.

Wednesday 26 April 2017 saw NDCN’s Breathe Oxford Group at the Nuffield Department of Medicine Building, taking part in a patient and public involvement event with the Oxford Respiratory Trials Unit.

This was the first of an exciting new series of events designed to illustrate the wide variety of respiratory research carried out in Oxford, bringing together academics, patients and members of the public. The group used interactive activities to stimulate discussion about how breathlessness impacts on people’s lives and how brain research may help. The brain cake went down a treat, with the cerebellum and frontal lobes being eaten the most quickly. People were intrigued by a life-size 3-D printed brain. Performing the step test while breathing through a drinking straw was difficult for even the fittest - demonstrating the challenges many people face every day. The ‘breathlessness board’ allowed attendees to describe their experiences of breathlessness using pictures and phrases.

Later in July, the group will partner with 'Life of Breath,' a Wellcome Trust funded project at the University of Bristol, to host a poetry reading evening focusing on breathlessness (http://breathe-into-other-lungs.eventbrite.co.uk/).

Learn about the science in this blog post: www.ox.ac.uk/news/science-blog?search=breathlessness&tag=All

Read more about Breathe Oxford here: www.ndcn.ox.ac.uk/research/breathe-oxford and follow the group on Twitter @breatheoxford

Teaching News

At the time of going to press, we have had 90 applications for the DPhil in Clinical Neurosciences, and have accepted 28.

The Oxford Online Programme in Sleep Medicine’s inaugural cohort comprises 17 students (11 PgDip students and 6 MSc), from 11 different countries and representing 10 different health-related disciplines. They had 28 applications.

Numbers are still being finalised for the next cohort – admissions are open until the end of July – but a further 20 students are expected to be admitted. (See www.ndcn.ox.ac.uk/oxford-online-programme-sleep-medicine).
Clinical Neurosciences Society

Cream Tea

This past term the social and charity group of the CNS has carried out some very successful events (such as the tasty ‘soup and roll’ lunch). In June there was a lovely afternoon with a cream tea and plant and card sales, raising over £185 for Myeloma UK. The final event for this term will be the NDCN summer party which we are all looking forward to. Fingers crossed for some nice warm weather.

A huge thanks to everyone who helps make our events happen, and to all those who support us, in particular Sue Ball, Judith Cossins, Louise Silver, Annette Burgess and Niki Andrew – as well as Ben Dean for continuing to run successfully the sports part of the CNS.

See https://sharepoint.nexus.ox.ac.uk/CNS for more information.

NDCN Staff Training Fund

All staff are reminded about the opportunity to apply for the staff training fund administered by the Clinical Neurosciences Society. Any member of staff in the Department, regardless of grade, can apply to the training fund for a grant of up to £300 to attend courses that will benefit their development and career.

Please see: https://sharepoint.nexus.ox.ac.uk/sites/NDCN/staff-intranet/human_resources/SitePages/Training.aspx

Badminton

Hilary Term saw the inaugural NDCN Badminton League, where ten eager shuttlers were keen to take advantage of the great facilities at Headington School for a shot to become NDCN’s first champion. There were lots of players jostling for position at the top of the table, but in the end a fantastic display from Greg Weir meant that he was crowned this year’s champ, remaining unbeaten in all of his games. Congratulations to Greg, and thanks to all the players for participating in what proved to be a very enjoyable season.

www.ndcn.ox.ac.uk

Cricket

On a hot Sunday in June at Exeter College Cricket Ground, NDCN’s Cricket Team played Cambridge Neurosciences in the second instalment of the annual Oxbridge Neurosciences cricket game. After last year’s agonising finish, Oxford were looking to go one better than a winning draw. We chose to bat first, with Sarosh Irani and Ben Dean looking to build a big partnership.

Unfortunately Cambridge were soon feeling very much in the game at 42-6. But then up stepped Sid Sethi and Simon Rinaldi, and a series of punishing sweeps and commanding drives started to swing the game back into Oxford’s favour, with a healthy total of 163-7 at tea. Ben also declared, deciding to give Cambridge a wicket on a wicket that wasn’t exactly behaving itself.

After a lovely tea, including an amazing homemade curry courtesy of the Irani family, it gradually became evident that Cambridge weren’t going to chase down the target. But the game had already reached 5.30pm and there was a maximum of only 20 overs to play. If Cambridge were still standing by the end of play, they would have nicked yet another draw and broken Oxford hearts in the process.

In the final over, Cambridge needed to survive 6 balls, Oxford needed one wicket. With all of NDCN crowding around the batsman, Cambridge managed to soak up the pressure, and it looked like it was not to be Oxford’s day. Then, just before the final delivery, Ben saw that Sarosh could make a difference in a short silly mid-off position, looking for a catch that could clinch the game. In came Campbell with a ball straight on the stumps...Cambridge's number 11 took a forward defensive stance and looked to pat it back down the pitch to rescue the match. However, the ball chipped up past Sarosh, who made a brilliant one-handed grab to secure the last wicket of the innings, giving Oxford an amazing last-ball victory at the expense of a stunned Cambridge.

A fantastic conclusion to a fascinating back-and-forth match. Thank you very much to all who played, especially those who contributed to refreshments. Also a big thank you to Simon Rinaldi for organising the use of Exeter College Cricket pitch, as well as the Cambridge side who travelled down to participate in a thrilling game.

The NDCN Cricket Team will be back in action in the second half of July for the Jack Cox tournament at the University Club, so look out for updates in the Weekly Newsletter and Workplace to come down and show your support!

www.ndcn.ox.ac.uk
About NDCN

Our Department provides a focus for world-leading translational neuroscience, allowing the swift transfer of biomedical findings to the clinical setting, and the delivery of evidence-based therapies for the benefit of society and the economy.

It incorporates the Division of Clinical Neurology (DCN), the Nuffield Laboratory of Ophthalmology (NLO), the Nuffield Division of Anaesthetics (NDA), the Centre for the Prevention of Stroke and Dementia (CPSD) and the Centre for Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging of the Brain (FMRIB).

This newsletter is produced once a term by the Communications Officer. Please get in touch if you have any feedback or suggestions regarding content for future issues.

Email: communications@ndcn.ox.ac.uk

Workplace

Workplace is a new tool designed to aid communication at work. In NDCN, we started using it in May 2017 to:

• Break down silos
• Make people welcome
• Celebrate achievements
• Facilitate best practice
• Announce opportunities

To date, over 420 people have claimed their accounts, and nearly 50 groups have been created, ranging from research groups to social and sports hubs.

Visit https://ndcn-gb.facebook.com to claim your account and see what all the fuss is about!

Networks and Mailing Lists

Oxford Neuroscience: This network coordinates neuroscience research across various departments in Oxford. At the core of our vision for neuroscience research lies acceleration, through collaboration and the provision of outstanding facilities.

Email: neuroscience-seminars-subscribe@maillist.ox.ac.uk

Immunology@Oxford: Are you a researcher interested in immunology, infection and inflammation? Then join the Immunology@Oxford Network. The vision is for IO to provide a hub where researchers can share resources and expertise to stimulate the creation of new ideas and collaborations.

Email: immunology_network-subscribe@maillist.ox.ac.uk

MSD Events Digest: Keep up to date with events, seminars, talks and workshops taking place across the Medical Sciences Division. Sign up to receive a weekly digest sent out via email every Friday, listing the events for the following week.

Email: msd_events-subscribe@maillist.ox.ac.uk

New Factsheet


Parents and Carers Factsheet

The Nuffield Department of Clinical Neurosciences is committed to supporting our staff in creating a sustainable work-life balance, and actively promotes informal and formal flexible working practices. For parents and carers specifically, we ensure the provision of generous leave schemes in line with the University of Oxford’s policies and national entitlements.

If you are planning a family or taking on additional caring duties, we strongly encourage you to inform the Department, so that we can provide you with the necessary support, and so that you might take full advantage of your entitlements. Please contact the HR team for further information and advice (hr@ndcn.ox.ac.uk).

BNA Festival of Neuroscience

The British Neuroscience Association held its annual festival from 10-13 April in Birmingham. NDCN was well represented, with Masud Husain giving the first plenary lecture ‘Reward and effort-based decision making’. Other speakers included George Tofaris, Heidi Johansen-Berg, Sarosh Irani, and Charlotte Stagg.

BNA council member Irene Tracey took part in a discussion forum ‘Brain research, ethics, policy and society’, convened by the International Neuroethics Society (INS), along with Colin Blakemore and INS Acting Chief Operating Officer Elaine Snell.

Workplace

by Facebook

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