

## Clean hands, caring hands: MJA Awards Ceremony 2009

The opening session of the Australian Medical Association's national conference this year was once again the venue for the presentation of the *Medical Journal of Australia's* two annual awards, the MJA/Wyeth Prize and the Dr Ross Ingram Memorial Essay Prize.

In an MJA "first", the 2008 MJA/Wyeth Award was presented to a familiar face. Dr Lindsay Grayson and colleagues won the 2005 MJA/Wyeth Award for their report of a multifaceted hand hygiene program at Austin Health in Melbourne, which increased hand hygiene compliance by hospital staff and reduced the rates of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* infection. Following their initial success, they were able to expand the program to several other Victorian hospitals and eventually to roll it out statewide. They described and evaluated this process in a report entitled "Significant reductions in methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteraemia and clinical isolates associated with a multisite, hand hygiene culture-change program and subsequent successful statewide roll-out" (published in the 2 June 2008 issue), which was assessed by the Journal's Content Review Committee as being the year's best research report. In presenting the \$10000 prize, Dr Michael Lee, Medical Director of Wyeth Australia, reaffirmed his company's commitment to preventive care, and congratulated the authors for their ability to build on their earlier findings to promulgate a widely beneficial intervention.

Improving the health of Aboriginal people in prison was the subject of the winning essay in this year's Dr Ross Ingram Memorial Essay Competition and, indeed, is its recipient's life work. Beverley Spiers, a Justice Health Aboriginal health worker and education



From left: Rosanna Capolingua, Ruth Armstrong, Beverley Spiers, Martin Van Der Weyden, Lindsay Grayson, Michael Lee.

officer based at Cessnock Correctional Centre in New South Wales, has worked in the criminal justice system for over 20 years and believes that all Aboriginal offenders should be encouraged into the caring hands of Aboriginal health workers. Her prize-winning essay, "Antecedents of chronic kidney disease in Aboriginal offenders in New South Wales prisons" (published in the 18 May 2009 issue), describes a single day at the Centre, in which she and a Justice Health nurse screened 88 Aboriginal offenders for markers of kidney disease. In accepting her \$5000 prize, donated by the Australasian Medical Publishing Company, Beverley reminded the conference about the real human stories behind the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and called for more funding for Aboriginal health workers in all areas where Indigenous Australians require access to medical care.

*Dr Ruth Armstrong, MJA*