Re-invention in China

A gap year spent in China changed the career path of Dr Anna Foley

A YEAR in China before committing to advanced training changed gastroenterologist Dr Anna Foley’s life.

After completing her MB BS at Monash University in 2001, Dr Foley did her internship and residency at The Alfred, before moving to Sydney for a stint at Concord Repatriation General Hospital until she earned her fellowship to the Royal Australasian College of Physicians.

“Up until then I was going to do rheumatology,” she tells the MJA.

“I had a fantastic mentor in Sydney in rheumatology. He was a great mentor and helped me to formulate my plans.”

But then came her year in China.

“I had almost committed to doing rheumatology but changed my mind during [that] year,” Dr Foley says.

“In China I realised it was time to separate from [my mentor] and meet new people. I also did a bit of general practice there, which put me off a little bit. I saw a lot of chronic back pain and it was a lot of the same thing every day.

“That was misinformed of me, but nevertheless [it shaped my thinking].”

On her return to Melbourne, Dr Foley committed instead to gastroenterology, and went back to The Alfred and Box Hill Hospitals to complete her advanced training.

“I had always been interested in gastroenterology — it’s a nice combination of different skills and there’s lots of communication with the patients.

“The patients are often very challenging. They’ve got long-term illness, and there’s a psychological overlay to much of it.

Dr Foley finished her gastroenterology training in 2009 and started in practice in 2010. She can be found at Brighton Gastroenterology on Melbourne’s bayside, and also has public appointments at both Box Hill and The Alfred, providing services in general gastroenterology and specialist functional gut disorder clinics. She has a keen interest in inflammatory bowel disease and performs gastroscopy, colonoscopy and capsule endoscopy.

“It’s been what I expected,” she says. “I was familiar with the hospital and the people and I had a really good advanced training experience. It prepared me quite well for practice.”

According to Dr Foley, there is no shortage of gastroenterologists. “In fact it’s quite a difficult program to get into.”

One thing that has changed for the better since she started her advanced training is the gender balance in the specialty.

“It was very male dominated,” Dr Foley says. “It almost seemed like you had to be the son of a top gastroenterologist in order to get into the training program. I almost shied away from it for that reason.

“But now, pleasingly, that’s been corrected.”

And just as well, as Dr Foley says female gastroenterologists are “absolutely essential for the field”.

“There are plenty of patients who couldn’t say to a man what they can to a woman. Older women with faecal incontinence, for example. Some have been to male gastroenterologists before and never mentioned it.

“A lot of teenage girls with functional gut disorders, irritable bowel syndrome … they’d rather speak to a woman.”

About 30% to 35% of people have a functional gut disorder through their life and it’s more common in women, says Dr Foley.

“It’s incredibly common. Whether the incidence is increasing or if there’s just greater awareness, is difficult to say. We’re certainly more interested in treating it than we used to be.”

Dr Foley and her husband have two young children. A “rich family life” and many outside interests are very important, she says, to a balanced life.

“We love to travel, experience the world with the children. I’m interested in art — I paint — see a lot of performing arts, and I love to cook. It has to be something special, though — not something you have every night of the week.”

“It almost seemed like you had to be the son of a top gastroenterologist in order to get into the training program”

Despite going in a different direction than the one suggested by her rheumatology mentor, Dr Foley believes mentorship should be an essential part of the support system for students and doctors-in-training.

“Mentors are such a great asset,” she says. “I think we’ve missed the boat in medicine with that a bit. Mentorship needs to be more formalised — matching people with appropriate mentors. A good mentor can have such a great influence, helping young people to make better choices.”

Dr Foley’s next 5 years will be about “reinvention”, she says. “It’s important to have other dialogues, constantly dream of reinvention.

“It’s good to stay engaged and on your toes.”

Cate Swannell

doi: 10.5694/mja16.0310C1
The National Health and Medical Research Council has announced its “10 of the best” research projects for 2015. Professor Anne Kelso, Chief Executive Officer of the NHMRC, said the projects selected had “achieved results of particular significance for the improvement of human health — whether through advancement of knowledge or the prevention, detection or treatment of disease”.

“Each year when projects are shortlisted for this award, we are struck by the extraordinary quality and diversity of research being undertaken in Australia with NHMRC support. This … is an opportunity to showcase some of that research and to honour the brilliant researchers who conceived, planned and delivered it.”

1. Drilling down: discovering the origins of dental anxiety, by Associate Professor Jason Armfield, from the University of Adelaide. “Associate Professor Armfield set out to explain the origins of dental fear and to understand why fear of the dentist is a serious psychological problem for many Australians. He developed a ‘dental anxiety scale’ that will help to identify and treat the condition across the world, leading to more people visiting the dentist and better population level oral health.” A/Prof Armfield was awarded an NHMRC early career fellowship worth $336 561. Team members: Dr Peter Arrow, Associate Professor Donald Chi, Mr Serge Chrisopoulos, Dr Manon Ketting, Dr Liana Luzzi, Dr Harry Mohan, Dr Vicki Skinner.

2. Delivering Australia from neurodegeneration. Associate Professor Helen Cooper led a team from the University of Queensland. “[Her] research aims to understand the molecular mechanisms controlling the birth of new neurons in the adult brain. In the long term, it is hoped that these insights will help to design therapeutic approaches to treat neurodegenerative diseases.” A/Prof Cooper and her team were awarded a project grant worth $322 534. Team members: Dr Conor O’Leary, Dr Dana Kai Bradford, Dr Min Chen, Ms Amanda White, Associate Professor Zhi Ping Xu, Professor Perry Bartlett.

3. Sanguine advances in detecting colorectal cancers. Associate Professor Leah Cosgrove and her team from the CSIRO (Food and Nutritional Sciences) developed a simple blood test to diagnose colorectal cancer. “A reliable, non-invasive blood test could augment the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program, either as an adjunct primary screen for those unable to do the stool test, or in triaging positive subjects to colonoscopy. This could help drive a significant reduction in colorectal cancer deaths in Australia.” A/Prof Cosgrove and her team were awarded a development grant worth $542 260. Team members: Dr Kim Fung, Dr Tim Adams, Dr Bruce Tabor, Dr Mike Buckley, Ms Ilka Pribe, Dr Leanne Purins, Dr Trevor Lockett, Mr Charles Lindall, Dr Larry LaPointe, Professor Tony Burgess, Professor Ed Nice, Professor Peter Gibbs, Associate Professor Andrew Ruszkiewicz, Mr James Moore, Dr Michelle Thomas, Associate Professor Rajvinder Singh, Associate Professor Paul McMurrick.

4. The scorpion king: lighting the way to defeating brain cancer. Professor David Craik and his team from the University of Queensland set out to make synthetic derivatives of a naturally occurring peptide, chlorotoxin, from the venom of a scorpion to use for brain tumour imaging. “The work was based on a discovery by collaborator, Dr Jim Olson, that through attaching a dye to chlorotoxin it could be used to ‘light up’ tumours. This allows surgeons to pick up small amounts of cancerous tissue during surgery, reducing the risk of the tumour reoccurring.” Prof Craik and his team were awarded a project grant worth $511 299. Team members: Professor Norelle Daly, Dr Jim Olson, Dr Muharrem Akcan, Ms Paola Ojeda, Dr Conan Wang, Dr Richard Clark, Dr Sonia Troeira Henriques, Dr Yen-Hua Huang.

5. Protein: the key to improved kidney functionality. Associate Professor Gordon Doig and his team from the University of Sydney showed that “critically ill patients who received better nutrition were less likely to develop kidney injury. These findings represent an important first step towards global practice change and offers the potential to reduce the need for surgery, dialysis and transplantation.” A/Prof Doig and his team were awarded a project grant worth $845 052. Dr Fiona Simpson, Ms Elizabeth Sweetman, Ms Philippa Heigges, Ms Jennifer Hannam, Professor Carol Pollock, Dr Douglas Chesher.

6. Gluten for punishment: challenging non-coeliac gluten sensitivity. Professor Peter Gibson and his team from Monash University “set out to determine whether gluten causes problems in people who do not suffer from coeliac disease. The team found that short-chain carbohydrates called FODMAPs, not gluten, might be triggering symptoms such as bloating and stomach pain. The results have put some scientifically valid findings in this controversial area.” Prof Gibson and his team were awarded project grant worth $661 496. Team members: Dr Jane Muir, Dr Jessica Biesiekierski, Ms Simone Peters,
Dr Evan Newnham, Dr Greg Yelland, Dr Jacqueline Barrett, Mrs Ourania Rosella.

7. Mending a broken heart: repairing injured heart cells. Professor Robert Graham and his team from the Victor Chang Cardiac Institute “embarked on their research to understand how the heart develops after birth and why heart muscle cells lose their ability to divide and make new cells. Their research markedly shifted the goal post and showed that heart muscle cells actually retain an ability to divide until adolescence. This discovery holds great promise for new approaches to managing a range of heart conditions.” They were awarded a project grant worth $484 697. Team members: Ms Deborah Randall, Professor Alastair Leyland, Professor Sandra Eades, Ms Sanja Lujic, Dr Timothy Churches, Associate Professor Mary Haines, Mr Michael Falster, Dr Kathleen Falster, Mr Holger Möller, Dr Aiden O’Loughlin, Professor Rebecca Ivers, Mr Tim Harrold, Ms Tracie Reinten.

8. Indigenous health: understanding the health gap. Professor Louisa Jorm and teams from Western Sydney University and the University of NSW “linked and scrutinised the vast data held by modern healthcare systems to understand the factors influencing disadvantage for Indigenous Australians. This important research will translate it into better disease prevention and patient care for Indigenous Australians, as well as more effective health care spending.” Prof Jorm and her teams were awarded a project grant worth $395 696. Team members: Professor Andrew Bassom, Associate Professor David Tingay, Dr Peter Noble, Dr Clare Berry, Professor Bela Suki, Dr David Kaczka, Dr Jane Kee, Dr Alex Wood, Dr Anna Lavizzari, Dr Elroy Zonnerveld, Mr Jake Hermann.

9. Breathing easy: supporting lung development of premature babies. Associate Professor Jane Pillow and her team from the University of Western Australia “sought to understand the respiratory problems of premature babies to help the sickest and smallest babies develop their lungs. This research has contributed a great deal to improving both the quality of healthcare available to premature babies at birth as well as their long-term health prospects.” They were awarded a project grant worth $395 696. Team members: Professor Andrew Bassom, Associate Professor David Tingay, Dr Peter Noble, Dr Clare Berry, Professor Bela Suki, Dr David Kaczka, Dr Jane Kee, Dr Alex Wood, Dr Anna Lavizzari, Dr Elroy Zonnerveld, Mr Jake Hermann.

10. Ectopic pregnancy treatment: a safer way. Professor Stephen Tong and his team from Monash University “are revolutionising the treatment of ectopic pregnancy, meaning most women presenting with the condition could be treated medically, rather than surgically. Not only will this make treating ectopic pregnancies safer, easier and more effective, but it may save many lives across the developing world where surgery is not possible.” They were awarded a project grant worth $228 770. Team members: Professor Terrance Johns, Dr Monika Skubisz, Professor Andrew Horne, Professor Euan Wallace.


Cate Swannell
doi: 10.5694/mja16.0310C2
Calendar of conferences in Australia and New Zealand

This calendar will be updated each month. If you have an event you would like to add, please include relevant details in an email to cswannell@mja.com.au.

The full version of the calendar is available online at www.mja.com.au

OCTOBER 2016

2-3  RACGP CEMP Advanced, Perth, WA
4  RACGP CPR Workshop, Brisbane, QLD
4  RACGP Emergency Update for Practice Staff (Including CPR), Adelaide, SA
7-8  3rd LCANZ Trans-national Breastfeeding Conference: Essential Breastfeeding, Melbourne, VIC
9-12  Australasian Genomic Technologies Association Conference and the New Zealand Next Generation Sequencing Conference, Auckland, NZ
9-13  Australian Orthopaedic Association and the New Zealand Orthopaedic Association Annual Scientific Meeting, Cairns, QLD
11  RACGP Perform CPR – A Workshop for GPs, Melbourne, VIC
11-14  Australian and New Zealand Burn Association 2016 Annual Scientific Meeting, Auckland, NZ
12-14  Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand Annual Conference, Wollongong, NSW
12-15  Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators 2016 Annual Conference, Brisbane, QLD
13  RACGP CPR Certification Course, Perth, WA
13-16  Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists 67th Annual Scientific Meeting, Gold Coast, QLD
14  RACGP Clinical Emergency Management Program: Intermediate, Sydney, NSW
14-15  The Paediatric Society of Queensland Inc’s Paediatric Scientific and Educational Annual Conference, Brisbane, QLD
14-16  2016 Australasian Military Medicine Association Conference, Melbourne, VIC
14-16  Inaugural National Educational Conference and Trade Display of the Australian Anaesthesia Allied Health Practitioners, Perth, WA
14-16  AECM Victoria Faculty Meeting, Torquay, VIC
15  Inaugural Australian Anaesthesia Allied Health Practitioners National Conference, Perth, WA
15  RACGP Psychodynamic Principles Workshop for GPs (Part 1), Melbourne, VIC
15  Build Your Practice Conference and Exhibition, Melbourne, VIC
15-16  Pelvic Pain Foundation of Australia Seminar and Physiotherapy Masterclass, Adelaide, SA
15-16  RACGP Clinical Emergency Management Program: Advanced, Sydney, NSW
16-19  RANZCOG ASM, Perth, WA
18  RACGP Emergency Medicine and Resuscitation Update (CPR for GPs), Adelaide, SA
18-21  Australian Association of Practice Managers 2016 National Conference, Melbourne, VIC
18-21  Joint Meeting of the 9th World Congress of Melanoma and the 14th International Congress of the Society for Melanoma Research, Brisbane, QLD
19  RACGP Grand Round Series 2016 – Session 3, Perth, WA
19-21  International Conference for Emergency Nurses, Alice Springs, NT
19-21  Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society ASM 2016, Brisbane, QLD
20-22  Rural Medicine Australia 2016 Conference, Canberra, ACT
20-22  41st ANZICS/ACCCN Intensive Care Annual Scientific Meeting and the 22nd Annual Paediatric and Neonatal Intensive Care Conference: Where to from here, Perth, WA
20-23  RCPA Anatomical Pathology and Laboratory Skills Workshop, Ballarat, VIC
21-22  Refresher/Advanced 2-Day ECT Course, Sydney, NSW
21-23  Medical Parents of Australia and New Zealand Inaugural Conference 2016: Leading a Double Life, Cairns, QLD
21-23  RACS Victorian Annual Surgical Meeting, Melbourne, VIC
22  Sport and Exercise Medicine Symposium: Recent Advances in Sports Medicine Care, Perth, WA
24-26  12th Biennial Asia Pacific International Mental Health Conference: Recovered Futures, Brisbane, QLD
25-27  International Mental Health Nursing Conference, Adelaide, SA
26-28  2016 ACHSM/ACHS Asia-Pacific Joint Congress, Brisbane, QLD
26-28  Integrated Emergency Care for Older Persons Summit, Melbourne, VIC
26-28  Resus at the Park 2016 Conference, Sydney, NSW
26-29  17th World Sterilization Congress, Brisbane, QLD
27  Surgical Leaders’ Forum 2016, Melbourne, VIC
27-28  Obesity Surgery Society of Australia and New Zealand 2016 conference: Dilemmas in Bariatrics, Sydney, NSW
28-29  The Australasian Melanoma Conference, Sydney, NSW
29  RACGP Skin Cancer Essentials, Sydney, NSW
30-Oct-2-Nov  Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs 2016 Conference, Sydney, NSW

NOVEMBER 2016

2  RACGP Administering Iron Infusion Intravenously, Adelaide, SA
2-4  9th Annual HTH Society of Australasian Conference, Adelaide, SA
5  RACGP Clinical Emergency Management Program: Intermediate, Brisbane, QLD
5  RACGP CPR Certification Course, Perth, WA
5  RACP Continuing Education Program 2016, Melbourne, VIC
5-6  ACD Dermatological Surgery and Procedures Workshop, Sydney, NSW
8-10  Lowitja Institute International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference, Melbourne, VIC
19  RACGP Psychodynamic Principles Workshop for GPs (Part 2), Melbourne, VIC
19  National Health Summit on Obesity Run by the RACGP, Melbourne, VIC
19  RACGP Perform CPR – A Workshop for GPs, Melbourne, VIC
11-12  1st Australia and New Zealand Conference on Sarcopenia and Frailty (Australian Institute for Musculoskeletal Science, Melbourne, VIC)
11-13  General Practice Conference and Exhibition, Melbourne, VIC
12  RACGP Psychodynamic Principles Workshop for GPs (Part 2), Melbourne, VIC
12-13  RACGP Clinical Emergency Management Program: Advanced, Brisbane, QLD
13  RACGP Procedural Skills for IMGs Preparing for RMO Roles, Sydney, NSW
14-16  2016 Australasian Sexual Health Conference, Adelaide, SA
16  RACGP CPR Certification Course, Perth, WA
16-18  2016 Australasian HIV & AIDS Conference, Adelaide, SA
18  RACGP Clinical Emergency Management Program: Intermediate, Melbourne, VIC
18-20  Australian Menopause Society 20th Congress, Perth, WA
19-20  RACGP Clinical Emergency Management Program: Advanced, Melbourne, VIC
19-23  44th RANZCOG Annual Scientific Congress: Where Innovation and Culture Meet, Melbourne, VIC
20-24  33rd Australian College of Emergency Medicine Annual Scientific Conference, Adelaide, SA
23  5th Annual NHMRC Symposium on Research Translation: Embedding Research into Health Care: Building a Culture of Quality, Melbourne, VIC
23  RACGP Grand Round Series 2016 – Session 4, Perth, WA
23-25  National Primary Health Care Conference, Melbourne, VIC
26  2016 RACP Northern Territory Annual Scientific Meeting, Darwin, NT
26-27  RACP WA Rural Physicians’ Workshop 2016, Nedlands, WA
27-29  Australian and New Zealand Falls Prevention Society Conference 2016, Melbourne, VIC
29  RACGP CPR Certification Course, Brisbane, QLD
30  RACP Victorian Further Education & Training for Paediatricians & Advanced Trainees (VicFEAT) 2016, Melbourne, VIC

FEBRUARY 2017

7-14  Australasian College of Sport and Exercise Physicians ASM: Keeping you Active, Gold Coast, QLD
24-26  Pathology Update 2017, Sydney, NSW

MARCH 2017

15-17  Sydney International Endoscopy Symposium 2017, incorporating the Westmead Endoscopy Symposium Nurses’ Workshop, Sydney, NSW
24-28  International Society of Ocular Oncology Annual Conference, Sydney, NSW
26-29  12th International Congress on Systemic Lymphomas Erythematous (LUPS 2017) and the 7th Asian Congress on Autoimmunity (ACA 2017), Melbourne, VIC
29  A day with Dan Siegel: The New Frontiers of Interpersonal Neurobiology, Newcastle, NSW

APRIL 2017

3-7  15th World Congress on Public Health: Voices, Vision, Action, Melbourne, VIC
26-29  14th National Rural Health Conference: A world of rural health, Cairns, QLD

doi: 10.5694/mja16.0310C4