



Translational Health Research Institute

Summer Scholarship Research Program 2019

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Project 121: Aboriginal medicinal plants of Cumberland Plain Woodlands: A literature review

Supervisor(s): A/Prof Ilse Blignault (Principal Supervisor)
Frances (Aunty Fran) Bodkin (Second Supervisor)

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Project description

Aboriginal peoples' knowledge and use of native plants for healing purposes varies across language groups and geographical locations. The different applications can be due to a range of factors including soil and microbiological ecology but also the plants growing in close proximity, i.e. the plant associations, which can optimise the medicinal properties and thus guide the preferred medicinal use of the plant. The knowledge of these plant associations, passed on to future generations through stories, is an important component of the Aboriginal knowledge and application of traditional medicinal plants.

The Cumberland Plain Woodlands are a distinct grouping of Australian native plants which grow across the Sydney Basin. They are places of significance for Aboriginal people with evidence of open campsites, scarred trees, grinding grooves, stone quarries, rock engravings and other places of cultural significance. Their presence at different locations provides an opportunity to investigate the local plant associations and their effect on the medicinal properties of traditionally significant plants.

This project will involve a literature search to identify previous studies undertaken of plants growing in Cumberland Plain Woodlands and reporting on their medicinal properties. The student will summarise the identified academic literature documenting the medicinal properties and the Aboriginal medicinal uses, including pharmacological and ethnobotanical studies and historical accounts. They will also explore Aboriginal stories about the identified plant associations.

The outcomes of this project will inform research projects to better understand the effect of plant associations on the medicinal potential of plants found in Cumberland Plain Woodlands. We expect that the outcomes will not only guide testing of selected plants in further studies but will provide support for Aboriginal traditional knowledge.

NB: A concurrent summer scholarship project, to be conducted by another student, will involve mapping Aboriginal medicinal plants and their associations in two areas of Cumberland Plain Woodlands in the Mount Annan Botanic Gardens.

Project Aims

The aim is to conduct a literature review on medicinal uses of plants growing in Cumberland Plain Woodlands and contribute to creation of a spreadsheet/database to summarise and manage the information on the plants identified.

Project Methods

Under supervision, the student will identify previous studies of plants growing in Cumberland Plain Woodlands and reporting evidence of their medicinal properties. The student will be required to perform a literature search using academic databases and other sources, review the documented medicinal properties and Aboriginal medicinal uses, write a report, and create and populate a spreadsheet/database. Aunty Fran will provide cultural guidance throughout the project.

Opportunity for Skill Development

The student have the opportunity to learn and appreciate Aboriginal culture and knowledge. They will learn about Australian bush medicines and develop research skills in planning, designing and conducting literature searches. They will develop skills collecting, reviewing and summarising records. The student may also have the opportunity to co-author a publication.

Students are required to have the following skills/meet the following pre-requisite(s) to apply

In addition to the generic selection criteria, the student will be required to have:

- An interest in, and respect for, Aboriginal culture, knowledge and history.
- An interest in Australian native plants and the environment
- Ability to work independently and within a team.

Experience conducting literature searches and familiarity with academic databases is not required but would be advantageous.

Project 122: Mapping Aboriginal medicinal plants and their associations in Cumberland Plain Woodlands

Supervisor(s): A/Prof Ilse Blignault (Principal Supervisor)
Frances (Aunty Fran) Bodkin (Second Supervisor)

Supervisor(s) contact information: i.blignault@westernsydney.edu.au
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Project description

Aboriginal peoples' knowledge and use of native plants for healing purposes varies across language groups and geographical locations. The different applications can be due to a range of factors including soil and microbiological ecology but also the plants growing in close proximity, i.e. the plant associations, which can optimise the medicinal properties and thus guide the preferred medicinal use of the plant. The knowledge of these plant associations, passed on to future generations through stories, is an important component of Aboriginal knowledge and application of traditional medicinal plants.

The Cumberland Plain Woodlands are a distinct grouping of Australian native plants which grow across the Sydney Basin. The Woodlands are places of significance for Aboriginal people with evidence of open campsites, scarred trees, grinding grooves, stone quarries, rock engravings and other places of cultural significance. Their presence at different locations provides an opportunity to investigate the local plant associations and their effect on the medicinal properties of traditionally significant plants.

This project will involve field work to survey vegetation in two specific areas of the Cumberland Plain Woodlands situated in Mount Annan Botanic Gardens, with particular attention paid to the plant associations. The student will document the medicinal plants through photographs as well as recording the information in a spreadsheet/database.

The outcomes of this project will inform research projects to better understand the effect of plant associations on the medicinal potential of plants found in Cumberland Plain Woodlands. We expect that the outcomes will not only guide testing of selected plants in further studies but will provide support for Aboriginal traditional knowledge.

NB: A concurrent summer scholarship project, to be conducted by another student, will involve a literature review of Aboriginal medicinal plants of the Cumberland Plain Woodlands.

Project Aims

The aims of this project are to:

1. Identify and map plant species growing in two areas of Cumberland Plain Woodlands in Mount Annan Botanic Gardens
2. Identify the major plant associations in each area and relate them to Aboriginal stories of traditional medicinal uses.

Project Methods

Under supervision, the student will be required to undertake fieldwork to survey vegetation in two specific areas of the Cumberland Plain Woodlands situated in Mount Annan Botanic Gardens, with particular attention paid to medicinal plants and their associations. In addition to mapping the distribution of the plants in the two areas, the student will document the medicinal plants through photographs and record all the information in a spreadsheet/database.

The data gathered will also be related to Aboriginal stories and history of plant associations to further understand the relationships between plants and their medicinal properties. Aunty Fran will provide cultural guidance throughout the project.

Opportunity for Skill Development

The student have the opportunity to learn and appreciate Aboriginal culture and knowledge. They will learn about Australian bush medicines and develop research skills in planning, designing and conducting vegetation surveys. They will develop skills in survey vegetation, understand the importance of plant verification and record keeping. The student may also have the opportunity to co-author a publication.

Students are required to have the following skills/meet the following pre-requisite(s) to apply

In addition to the generic selection criteria, the student will be required to have:

- An interest in, and respect for, Aboriginal culture, knowledge and history.
- An interest in Australian native plants and the environment
- Ability to work independently and within a team
- Capacity to travel to and from Mount Annan Botanic Gardens for fieldwork.
- Would suit a third year student with a mature work approach and an interest in Honours or HDR studies.

Project 123: Delivering Mindfulness Interventions in CALD communities : Follow-up survey of a Train-the-Trainer Program

Supervisor(s): A/Prof Ilse Blignault (Principal Supervisor)
Dr Shameran Slewa-Younan (Second Supervisor)

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Project description

Migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds face numerous barriers in accessing mental health care, resulting in under-utilisation of services. For those who do seek professional help there is a scarcity of multilingual clinical tools and self-management resources. Recent evaluation research with Arabic-speaking and Bengali-speaking community members in Sydney demonstrated that a Mindfulness-Based Intervention (MBI) was compatible with their cultural and religious practices and reduced levels of depression, anxiety and stress. The CALD MBI is an evidence-based program, based on the work of Australian psychologist Dr Russ Harris, which has been adapted for use by the Arabic-speaking and Bengali-speaking communities. The program aims to enhance participants' ability to be present and focus on the here and now, and to let go of painful memories from the past and anxious thoughts about the future. Since 2017, the CALD MBI has been delivered to 23 groups with a total of 281 participants (15 Arabic groups with 178 participants and 8 Bengali groups with 103 participants).

In addition, over 70 bilingual mental health clinicians and community workers (mostly speaking Arabic or Bengali-speaking but some speaking other foreign languages) have been trained facilitating delivery of the CALD MBI in a group setting. Structured feedback was collected at the end of each of the five facilitator training sessions through a short paper questionnaire. This project will involve analysis of follow-up data collected through a short online survey, as well as preparation of a report on the training component of this ongoing program of research. The online survey is designed to understand how the trainees have applied their learnings from the training.

The larger research translation project (Mindfulness Interventions in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities project) is funded by Central and Eastern Sydney PHN. Western Sydney University has been commissioned by South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) to conduct the evaluation.

Project Aims

This project aims to analyse and report on the longer-term impact and immediate outcomes of the CALD Mindfulness Intervention Facilitator Training that has been conducted by SESLHD (the Mindfulness Interventions in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities project) since 2017.

Project findings will feed directly into the larger project and may also be used in preparation of a journal article.

Project Methods

First, the student will be required to analyse an existing qualitative data set comprised of responses to pre-coded and open-ended questions that will have been recently collected via an online survey from bilingual mental health clinicians and bilingual community workers who were trained in using the CALD MBI.

Second, the student will be required to review the existing analysis of the post-training questionnaire feedback (responses to a series of 13 statements using a 5-point Likert Scale) and to conduct any further analysis that may be required.

Third, the student will be required to write up the combined findings in a single report and a short newsletter article.

Opportunity for Skill Development

The student will develop/enhance their skills in conducting qualitative data analysis and report writing. There is the potential to be an author on a publication.

Students are required to have the following skills/meet the following pre-requisite(s) to apply

In addition to the generic selection criteria, the student will be required to be in their final years of their undergraduate degree and have a interest in improving mental health services for under-served populations.

Project 124: Can knowledge transfer promote maternal, newborn and women's health?

Supervisor(s): A/Prof Ann Dadich (Principal Supervisor)
Dr Dominiek Coates (Second Supervisor)

Supervisor(s) contact information: A.Dadich@westernsydney.edu.au
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Project description

In Australia and abroad, maternal, newborn, and women's health is far from ideal. Many women and their newborns experience clinical issues that can have short- and long-term consequences. For women, these issues include (but are not limited to): gestational diabetes; pre-eclampsia; complications following the use of birthing interventions; postpartum haemorrhage; and premature death. For newborns, they include (but are not limited to): low-birth weight; infection; birth asphyxia; as well as premature death⁷⁻⁹. Despite (emerging) evidence on what works, for who, and when, and relatedly, recent improvements¹⁰⁻¹², there is considerable opportunity to optimise maternal, newborn, and women's health(care). This is because, as Prolman¹³ helpfully summarised:

almost 800 women die because of complications during pregnancy and childbirth... MOST of the maternal deaths that happen CAN be prevented... Many women don't see a skilled health professional enough during pregnancy... [and] The lack of skilled care is the main obstacle to better health for mothers... My biggest takeaway is that all of this suffering is completely unnecessary. And the good news is, this CAN be prevented.

In addition to the personal implications for women and their newborns, poor maternal, newborn, and women's health(care) can have social and economic implications. Consider for instance, the effects on family members – including children and young people: who are required assume greater caring responsibilities; who prematurely end their education to enter the workforce or labour market; or who experience mental health issues associated with trauma and loss¹⁴⁻¹⁷. Beyond the family budget, economic implications include the increased use of limited public health resources, as well as the government welfare destitute family members might require.

Knowledge translation represents an avenue to address the oft-cited chasm between what should happen and what does happen¹⁸. Although variously defined, knowledge translation encompasses myriad processes through which different knowledges coalesce to inform practice. As such, it is more than the mere use of empirical results or clinical guidelines – it involves the amalgam of these with other knowledges, including (but are not limited to): the experiential wisdom and preferences of a patient and their family members; cultural norms; clinician expertise; the managerial and leadership prowess of their superiors; as well as the knowledge embedded within local networks – be they clinical or familial^{19,20}. Despite considerable interest in knowledge translation²¹⁻²⁷, with few exceptions²⁸⁻³¹, there is a dearth of research to clarify how it can promote maternal, newborn, and women's health. This project will address this void.

Heeding national and international calls for action, the **aim** of the supervisory team's research program is to promote quality maternal, newborn, and women's healthcare. This aspiration will be addressed via a systematic review of extant literature to clarify:

- How knowledge translation is characterised in maternal, newborn, and women's healthcare
- How knowledge translation has been explored in this context
- Research questions that warrant (further) attention
- The associated implications for policymakers, managers, practitioners (*sensu lato*), and recipients of health services – be they patients or carers

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, this project aligns with the Western Sydney University Research and Innovation Plan (2018 - 2020). Specifically, and as per the research plan of the Translational Health Research Institute:

- Following a systematic review of academic databases, this project will culminate with evidence that serves to:
 - 'Develop a cogent research narrative and community profile to define our role in the health and wellbeing industry and to ensure our reputation matches our research quality'
 - Inform ways to helpfully 'transform the health and wellbeing of the people of Western Sydney, Australia and globally through translational research that is holistic, collaborative and targeted'
 - Champion 'person-centred care, evidence-based practice and systemic change'
- Premised on 'collaboration, translation and reputation', this project will:
 - 'Build on and formalise current collaborations... to ensure health challenges are understood, research is relevant and new knowledge is applied where it is needed'
 - Determine opportunities to pursue to optimise knowledge translation
 - Further the standing of this reputable Institute given the international significance of the project focus

Project Aims

The **aim** of this project is to promote quality maternal, newborn, and women's healthcare. This will be achieved by addressing the following **objectives**:

1. Develop and pilot-test search strategies to systematically scour relevant academic databases for publications pertaining to knowledge translation in maternal, newborn, and women's healthcare
2. Identify publications that meet inclusion criteria
3. Extract and analyse pertinent content from the identified publications to clarify:
 - a. How knowledge translation is characterised in maternal, newborn, and women's healthcare
 - b. How knowledge translation has been explored in this context
 - c. Research questions that warrant (further) attention
 - d. The associated implications for policymakers, managers, practitioners (*sensu lato*), and recipients of health services - be they patients or carers
2. Report on the findings for the purpose of a manuscript for a refereed academic journal

Project Methods

- The supervisory team, including the student, will:
 - Develop, pilot-test, and deploy search strategies tailored for relevant academic databases
 - Determine the inclusion criteria
 - Develop an extraction tool to aid the analysis of pertinent content from the identified publications
- The student will:
 - Cull the identified publications
 - Extract pertinent content from the identified publications
 - Contribute to a manuscript for a refereed academic journal

Opportunity for Skill Development

Supported by the supervisory team, the student is expected to develop the following skills through the course of this project:

- Superior **analytical** skills to conduct a systematic review
- Improved **writing** skills to report on research findings for an academic audience

Students are required to have the following skills/meet the following pre-requisite(s) to apply

This project is suitable for a student who:

- Is in their final-year of an undergraduate degree
- Is studying, has studied, or has an interest in the discipline(s) of: management, nursing, medicine, health and/or social policy, social science, psychology, sociology, the humanities, and/or health science
- Has excellent communication skills and confidence in their basic writing skills

Project 125: How to promote quality palliative care for indigenous peoples.

Supervisor(s): A/Prof Ann Dadich (Principal Supervisor)
Dr Aileen Collier (Second Supervisor)

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Project description

With ageing populations and the international rise of chronic illnesses, like cancer, renal disease, and dementia, palliative care represents an important part of many health systems^{2,3}. However, hospital care is costly, and hospitals have a limited capacity to meet demand. Furthermore, many people prefer to die at home⁴. For these reasons, palliative care within and beyond hospitals is receiving greater international recognition and government support⁵⁻¹⁰. Furthermore, it is associated with: the reduced use of other health services; improved quality of life; reduced symptom burden¹¹; and better patient and carer satisfaction¹².

Contrary to popular belief, ‘Palliative care is not just for those who are dying’¹³ or with ‘one foot in the grave’¹⁴. It represents:

an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment, and treatment of pain and other problems – physical, psychosocial and spiritual⁷.

The breadth of this definition suggests two key points. First, it suggests that palliative care involves many dynamic components – be they tangible, like clinicians (both within and beyond a service, including hospital-based clinicians, community health clinicians, and general practitioners), service managers, treatments, and equipment; or intangible, like the relationship between a clinician, patient, and carer, as well as psychosocial care. Second, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, whereby palliative care involves a synergistic relationship between these dynamic components.

For two key reasons, palliative care – especially that which is community-based – is particularly important for Indigenous peoples. First, relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts, Indigenous peoples often: experience higher levels of chronic illness; require hospitalisation more often; and die prematurely^{15,16}. Second, Indigenous peoples typically prize family and community connections¹⁷. Although the importance of ‘healing, cultural empowerment, and... self-determination by... [first] peoples’¹⁸ has been acknowledged, there is limited clarity on how to promote quality palliative care for Indigenous peoples. This project will address this void.

The **aim** of the supervisory team's research program is to promote quality palliative care for Indigenous peoples. This aspiration will be addressed via a systematic review of extant literature to clarify:

- What it is and what it involves
- Models and frameworks with demonstrated value for Indigenous peoples
- Research questions that warrant (further) attention
- The associated implications for policymakers, managers, practitioners (*sensu lato*), and recipients of health services – be they patients or carers

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, this project aligns with the Western Sydney University Research and Innovation Plan (2018 - 2020). Specifically, and as per the research plan of the Translational Health Research Institute:

- Following a systematic review of academic databases, this project will culminate with evidence that serves to:
 - 'Develop a cogent research narrative and community profile to define our role in the health and wellbeing industry and to ensure our reputation matches our research quality'
 - Inform ways to helpfully 'transform the health and wellbeing of the people of Western Sydney, Australia and globally [particularly Indigenous peoples] through translational research that is holistic, collaborative and targeted'
 - Champion 'person-centred care, evidence-based practice and systemic change'
- Premised on 'collaboration, translation and reputation', this project will:
 - 'Build on and formalise current collaborations... to ensure health challenges are understood, research is relevant and new knowledge is applied where it is needed'
 - Determine opportunities to pursue to optimise knowledge translation, particularly cultural knowledge
 - Further the standing of this reputable Institute given the international significance of its focus

Project Aims

The **aim** of this project is to promote quality palliative care for Indigenous peoples. This will be achieved by addressing the following **objectives**:

1. Develop and pilot-test search strategies to systematically scour relevant academic databases for publications pertaining to palliative care for Indigenous peoples
2. Identify publications that meet inclusion criteria
3. Extract and analyse pertinent content from the identified publications, with reference to:
 - a. What it is and what it involves
 - b. Models and frameworks with demonstrated value for Indigenous peoples
 - c. Research questions that warrant (further) attention
 - d. The associated implications for policymakers, managers, practitioners (*sensu lato*), and recipients of health services – be they patients or carers
4. Report on the findings for the purpose of a manuscript for a refereed academic journal

Project Methods

- The supervisory team, including the student, will:
 - Develop, pilot-test, and deploy search strategies tailored for relevant academic databases
 - Determine the inclusion criteria
 - Develop an extraction tool to aid the analysis of pertinent content from the identified publications
- The student will:
 - Cull the identified publications
 - Extract pertinent content from the identified publications
 - Contribute to a manuscript for a refereed academic journal

Opportunity for Skill Development

Supported by the supervisory team, the student is expected to develop the following skills through the course of this project:

- Superior **analytical** skills to conduct a systematic review
- Improved **writing** skills to report on research findings for an academic audience
 - previous students supervised by this supervisory team have submitted their research findings to high-quality journals
- Develop an understanding of palliative care
- Develop insights into global inequities of palliative care
- Develop insights into decolonising methodologies

Students are required to have the following skills/meet the following pre-requisite(s) to apply

This project is suitable for a student who:

- Is in their final-year of an undergraduate degree
- Is studying, has studied, or has an interest in the discipline(s) of: management, nursing, medicine, health and/or social policy, social science, psychology, sociology, the humanities, and/or health science
- Has excellent communication skills and confidence in their basic writing skills

Project 126: Enhancing Young Children's Guided Learning, Health and Nutrition, and Wellbeing through Creation of a School-based Playful Learning Garden: Literature review and report.

Supervisor(s): Catherine Kaplun (Principal Supervisor)
Rebekah Grace (Second Supervisor)

Supervisor(s) contact information: C.kaplun@westernsydney.edu.au
rebekah.grace@westernsydney.edu.au

Project description

Young children living in low socioeconomic areas are at greater-than-average risk for entering school with low language/communication, mathematics and spatial reasoning abilities and other skills necessary to do well in the school context, in addition to higher risk of health and nutrition difficulties including higher incidence of diabetes. This in turn increases their likelihood of persisting academic and life difficulties and poorer health and nutrition outcomes. Addressing the social determinants of health is a focus of many programs however it requires an integrated and complex approach to solve these multifactorial issue.

This project will use an innovative approach to support children's early learning and development addressing the stream of translational research in education and health (specifically in health- and nutrition-related reasoning abilities and in education areas such as mathematics, spatial awareness and communication/reading) through the use of playful guided learning opportunities incorporated into a schoolyard-community garden. Adopting a translational approach to the research, this project will provide social innovation in an early childhood/primary school learning context. We have expanded an active ongoing collaboration, built on existing relationships between the school and local community, local council and researchers to include local and international colleagues to provide a trans-disciplinary team with experience in the early years, health, education, community development and place-based learning development projects. This collaboration provides an opportunity for innovation in co-design to implement evidence-based health and education practices and behaviours within a novel and interactive learning context. Community consultation process will be needed to ensure the co-design process is flexible and adapts to ensure the project meets local needs and has appropriate uptake of the facility by the local/school community.

This project will translate evidence-based practice in the areas of health and education learning/knowledge into an innovative playful garden design for children in a disadvantaged school in Western Sydney to enhance children's early learning, health, nutrition and wellbeing. Evidence shows the gains that can be made, and learning enhanced, when children participate in activities designed to target the spectrum of play (Weisberg et al., 2016; Zosh et al., 2019). This project will take the learnings and evidence

from several disciplines and incorporate them into a school learning garden that will provide an innovative view of what learning can be like for children and what the future of learning should be to have much-needed improvement in children's health and education, particularly for children living in disadvantaged areas where the learning environment at school can provide a catalyst for children's continued engagement in school and lifelong learning experiences and health and life/health outcomes (<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Playful-Learning-Playbook.pdf>). This project will also incorporate learnings from the Cool Schools project to provide children with a sustainable safe learning context into the future (<https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws%3A47915>) and learnings from projects in engineering and industrial design in the use of environmentally friendly and sustainable materials where possible as well as adaptation of learning activities for outdoor environment.

This project will be incorporated into the larger main project and used to support a synergy grant application in 2020. The student may like to continue to be involved and part of the larger project.

Project Aims

The student project will serve as a stand alone project within the larger project and aims:

- Develop a profile of the local school community and the wider demographics of the local area
- Determine baseline data for children's development based on the Australian Early Development Census and other ABS data
- Determine the research already being done to enhance children's early learning and development through community engagement and placemaking, particularly but not solely focused on gardens and outdoor learning contexts
- Identify opportunities for collaborations within the local area.

Project Methods

The student will work on the literature review for this program and will liaise with international collaborators, drawing on their expertise in co-designing, planning, developing and evaluating play based learning areas. Part of the review will also involve assessing the context of the present community using community data provided in Australian Census databases to develop a situational analysis of the local area and a more specific analysis of the school demographic with a focus on vulnerability of children within the school catchment area. This will be written up as an easy to read report for the school and community and an academic paper and the student included as an author. The student will develop skills in database searching, assessing relevant literature for appropriate content and methodology, and writing for community and academic audiences and well as in community engagement practices.

Opportunity for Skill Development

This project will engage the student in database searching and identify relevant research in this field. It will upskill the student in recognising and reading academic and related material to create summary reports of the information and lead to the improvement of writing and database access skills. The report will be written up and provided to the school to ensure it reflects the school population targeted for the larger intervention project. The

student will be involved in engagement with a range of community and university members to feedback the report/publication findings.

Students are required to have the following skills/meet the following pre-requisite(s) to apply

The student will have a basic understanding of database work and an understanding of the need for a systematic approach to literature reviews. Some community-based engagement/experience would also be helpful, however this is not essential and support will be provided.