

MEDIA RELEASE

Dated 28 March 2007

For immediate release



TURNING EVIDENCE INTO ACTION

Filling gaps in pre-conception care: Monash University doctor awarded prestigious national Fellowship

Increasing folate supplementation to reduce neural tube defects through improved pre-conception care is the goal of Associate Professor Danielle Mazza who has just received a Fellowship co-sponsored by the National Institute of Clinical Studies (NICS) and the Health and Medical Research Foundation of the Hospitals Contribution Fund of Australia (HCF).

Associate Professor Mazza will use the NICS-HCF Foundation Fellowship to undertake a two-year implementation project that aims to address a gap between evidence and practice relating to the role of folate supplementation. She will work with general practitioners to increase the number of women taking folate during the periconceptual period so that the incidence of neural tube defects is reduced.

Neural tube defects (NTD) such as spina bifida occur at a prevalence of 1.4 per 1,000 births, with the incidence in Indigenous infants almost double that of non-Indigenous infants. Less than 40 per cent of babies affected with neural tube defects survive to birth and those with spina bifida experience lifelong disability.

“Despite good evidence that adequate intake of folate in the periconceptual period (one month prior and during the first three months of pregnancy) can prevent 70 per cent of NTD cases, many women of childbearing age are unaware of this association and fail to use folate supplements.” explained Associate Professor Mazza.

“In Victoria, only 30 per cent of women are aware that taking folate can reduce the incidence of NTD and national figures are no better. The key lies with education, but according to recent studies, many GPs and other health providers are not adequately promoting folate supplementation to women of child-bearing age, even when they’re aware of their intention to conceive,” she added.

Associate Professor Mazza’s NICS-HCF Foundation Fellowship will aim to work with both GPs and their patients. She will encourage GPs and their practices to promote the need for pre-pregnancy consultations to women and she will also develop patient-focussed education material, in consultation with consumers.

“As Australia’s national agency for closing gaps in health care, NICS is delighted to award this Fellowship to Associate Professor Mazza,” said NICS Chief Executive Officer, Dr Heather Buchan.

“Through the generous support of the HCF Health and Medical Research Foundation, this work will make an important contribution to the prevention of neural tube defects in newborn babies.”

Associate Professor Mazza will join five other health professionals from Victoria, the Northern Territory, Tasmania and Western Australia in the NICS Fellowship program for 2007.

Release ends.

Interviews: Meredith Cameron, T: 03 88660409 M: 0409 383 152
mcameron@nicssl.com.au

For more information about the NICS Fellowship Program : www.nicssl.com.au

Note to editors

The National Institute of Clinical Studies (NICS), www.nicssl.com.au, is Australia's national agency for improving health care by helping close important gaps between best available evidence and current clinical practice. NICS is funded by the Australian Government. NICS will become an institute of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) on 1 April 2007. As part of NICS' transfer to the NHMRC, the Commonwealth, as the member of NICS, has appointed a liquidator under the members' voluntary winding up provisions of the Corporations Act. This is the mechanism used to wind up a company that is able to pay its debts and meet its commitments. During the transfer, NICS' business operations will continue as normal.

The NICS Fellowship program, which was launched in 2003, directly contributes to closing evidence-practice gaps by supporting health professionals to undertake practical projects that aim to improve health outcomes for people by getting high quality evidence into everyday clinical practice in particular health settings.

The two-year, part-time Fellowships are open to early- to mid-career health professionals across the health care spectrum, including doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, paramedics, health care managers, and policy makers.

The Fellowships provide an annual stipend as well as professional development opportunities, training programs in evidence implementation, mentorship, and opportunities to network with and learn from world-class experts who come to Australia as part of NICS' Visiting Experts program.

Applications for NICS Fellowships 2008 open at the end of April 2007.

The HCF Health and Medical Research Foundation is a charitable trust established by the Hospitals Contribution Fund of Australia [HCF] to encourage medical research and research and enquiry into the provision, administration and delivery of health services in Australia.

For more information: www.hcf.com.au