NDARC at 25: Research Highlights from its First Quarter Century

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and
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Some History

- Established in 1987 (along with NDRI in Perth)
- An outcome of 1985 Special Premiers’ Conference
  - Prompted by rising heroin use and crime
  - Recommended by 1977 Senate Inquiry: An Intoxicated Society
- Largely began from scratch
  - Very little research on alcohol and drugs in Australia
  - Clinician researchers but no institutional research base
  - Foundation Director, Nick Heather, recruited from UK
  - Janet Greeley trained at ARF in Toronto
  - NDRI Director David Hawks had worked in UK and WHO
  - Local staff recruited from psychology
- What has 25 years of sustained funding achieved?
NDARC Research Outputs from Web of Science

1300 papers; 23985 citations; 18.45 citations/paper
The Centre’s Growth

• Staff numbers
  • initial academic staff of 6 (1 Professor and 2 academic staff)
  • now 125 staff (including 8 Professors)

• Income:
  • Increased from under ~$1M to $14M

• Research outputs per annum
  • Peer reviewed: from < 20 to 120
  • 64 other: technical reports, monographs, books etc

• Students and researchers trained
  • 20 doctoral students
  • 105 staff trained in research
Emerging Research Programs

• Much original work was opportunistic:
  • funding, political interest, availability of data,
  • interest from field, access to patients etc

• More systematic research programs emerged
  • In response to earlier work
  • In discussions with funders and field
  • As funding became available
    – Initially from Commonwealth
    – Increasingly from competitive research funding

• Describe major work by substance
Alcohol

• **Major interests of Nick Heather**
  • Screening and brief interventions in primary care
  • Cue exposure for heavier problem drinkers
  • Quality Assurance Project guidelines
  • Early attempt to trial naltrexone

• **Overshadowed by concern about illicit drugs**
  • Heroin use a dominant political issue
  • Alcohol use disorders in NSMHWB

• **Alcohol use now very much on research agenda**
  • Pharmacotherapies and brief interventions
  • Community-based interventions in rural NSW towns
Heroin use

• Reviews of treatment literature
  • Quality Assurance Project treatment guidelines
  • Methadone treatment review for NSW Health
• Epidemiology of fatal and nonfatal opioid overdoses:
  • Risk factors and interventions to prevent opioid overdoses
• Epidemiology of heroin use and harms
  • Ethnographic research in SW Sydney
  • Estimating the number of dependent heroin users
  • WHO Global Burden of Disease studies
• Treatment Evaluations
  • Buprenorphine clinical trial and NEPOD project
  • Australian Treatment Outcome Study
• Evaluation of policy responses: Drug Policy Modelling Project
Cannabis Use

• Cognitive effects of chronic use
• Reviews of adverse health effects of cannabis
  • Contributions to GBD (2012)
• Studies of long-term cannabis users
  • NSW North Coast and Sydney
• The nature and treatment of cannabis dependence
  • Treatment trials of CBT and brief interventions
• National Cannabis Prevention and Intervention Centre
  • Public outreach and education
  • Provider training
• Policy evaluations: Drug Policy Modelling Project
Stimulants and Party Drugs

• Reviews of literature on amphetamines and cocaine
• Earliest survey of MDMA use and effects (1991)
• Studies of injecting amphetamine users
  • Early 1990s: psychotic symptoms; HIV risk; treatment seeking
  • Origins of Illicit Drug Reporting System
  • Cognitive effects of psychostimulants: doctoral research
• Methamphetamine use 2000s
  • Interventions for problem amphetamine users: dexamphetamine
  • Psychosis risks
  • Prospective studies of users
• Stimulant related deaths
  • Cocaine, MDMA and methamphetamine
Tobacco Research

• Quality Assurance Project:
  • Treatment Guidelines
  • Meta-analysis of unassisted cessation

• GP based interventions
  • Robyn Richmond’s group at St Vincents’ Hospital

• Tobacco and mental health
  • Analyses of 1997 NSMHWB

• NHMRC funded project 2012
  • RCT of financial counselling for low SES smokers
Psychiatric Comorbidity

- Comorbidity literature review (1996)
- National Survey of Mental Health and Well-Being (1997)
  - Prevalence of alcohol & drug dependence
  - Patterns of comorbidity with mental disorders
  - Service utilisation and disability
- Commonwealth National Comorbidity Initiative 2001
- Comorbidity a major theme in ATO Study
  - Program of doctoral research
- NDARC’s key role in design and conduct of NSMHWB 2007
- Epidemiology of mental disorders a major NDARC strength
- Award of NHMRC CRE in comorbidity
Special populations

- Needs of women with AOD problems
  - Evaluation of Jarrah House
- Youth with AOD problems
  - Ted Noffs outcome studies
  - Cannabis check up for youth
- Prisoners
  - Epidemiology of IDU in prisons
  - RCT of MMT in prison setting
- Indigenous Australians
  - Early work with Ernest Hunter and Maggie Brady
  - New work undertaken within the Centre
Public and Policy Engagement

• Good media coverage of research
  • Thanks to recommendations of early review

• Frequent source of information & comment
  • Accessible briefings for policy makers and public

• Helped put drug issues on the public agenda:
  • Opioid OD deaths late 1990s
  • Mental health effects of stimulants
  • Prevalence of cannabis dependence
  • Comorbidity with mental disorders

• Responding to public concerns
  • Cannabis use
International Recognition

• World Health Organisation (since early 1990s):
  • Health effects of cannabis; MMT; Swiss heroin trials
  • Global Burden of Disease and illicit drugs
• World Bank (2006)
  • Disease Control Priorities Project
• UN Office of Drugs and Crime
  • Demand reduction report late 1990s
  • World Drug Report revamping
• Cochrane Collaboration on opioid treatment
• National Governments: UK; House of Lords
In Summary

Sustained funding and support from the field has produced an:

• Internationally recognized research powerhouse that
  – attracts and retains high quality staff
  – has a depth and breadth of expertise & knowledge
    • Epidemiology, interventions, treatment, policy analysis
  – has the capacity to respond to new challenges
  – publishes high impact, internationally recognised work

• With plenty more still to do
Drug Futures

• Alcohol abuse & dependence:
  • Social neglect of alcohol abuse and intoxication
  • Promoting treatment within a public health approach

• Emerging drug trends:
  • Need for continuous monitoring of new drugs & pharmaceuticals
  • Assessing prevalence of use and harms
  • Characteristics of users

• Implications of neuroscience & genetics
  • For governing ideas of drug use and addiction
  • For treatment, prevention and public health