

September 2004  
Volume 1, Issue 1

# PSSA News

Newsletter of the Physiology Society of Southern Africa (PSSA)

## Highlights:

- *Focus on:*  
The School of  
Physiology,  
University of the  
Witwatersrand

## Inside contents:

In the news	2
Diary	3
Report-back	3
Positions	3
We need.....	4

## Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of the Physiology Society of Southern Africa's new publication, PSSA News. The aim of this newsletter is to improve communication between physiologists in Southern Africa, and share news of achievements, awards, events and any other items of general interest. To do so effectively, we'll need your help. Although we'll solicit specific information from

departments, we encourage PSSA members to submit any information or articles of general interest. So let us know about your achievements or those of your colleagues, and share any funny stories you may have, or tell us about your research. Also let us know what you think of this newsletter and if you have any ideas to improve it.

In this issue, we profile the School of Physiology at the University of the Witwatersrand. We'll focus on one department in Southern Africa in each issue.

In the next issue, we'll bring you news from the Annual PSSA Congress, to be held in Coffee Bay from 12-15 September. We look forward to meeting up then.

*Kennedy and Andrea.*

## FOCUS ON: Physiology at Wits

The School of Physiology at the University of the Witwatersrand is one of seven schools in the Faculty of Health Sciences. The School, which has a total of 55 staff members (academic and support), teaches about 1 000 students per year; thus about 5% of students registered in the entire University take a course in physiology during their degree. All undergraduate students in the Faculty of Health Sciences study physiology for at least one full academic year, while

about 40% of all BSc graduates in the biological sciences in the Faculty of Science take physiology as a major subject.

The School, headed by Prof Helen Laburn, is the largest entity teaching physiology in South Africa, and many of its graduates hold high-profile and prestigious appointments both in South Africa and around the globe. The School takes a keen interest in the activities of the Physiology Society of Southern Africa, and currently has two

members of council, Prof David Gray and Prof Angela Woodiwiss. Three members of the School also have served on Commissions of the International Union of Physiological Sciences (IUPS) and two are full members of the UK Physiological Society, arguably the leading physiological society in the world.

The School has long been a major research centre within the University, and is well equipped and  
*(continued overleaf)*



*Prof Helen Laburn  
Head: Wits  
School of Physiology*

supported financially by the South African statutory funding bodies (Medical Research Council, MRC; and National Research Foundation, NRF), as well as by private institutions, the business community, and the University. The School is pleased to be the home of the only NRF A-rated physiologist in the country, Prof Duncan Mitchell. The School houses two research units recognized by the

University; the Brain Function Research Unit and the Cardiovascular Pathophysiology and Genomics Research Unit. Principal areas of current research in the School include cardiovascular pathophysiology, exercise, endocrinology, pain, fever, thermal physiology, lipid metabolism in marine organisms and physiology of free-living mammals. The School is home to about 50 postgraduate

students and 18 Honours students, and welcomes applications for honours, higher degree and postdoctoral study.

More information about the School can be obtained at:

<http://www.health.wits.ac.za/physiology>

Tel: 011-717-2363

Fax: 011-643-2765

e-mail:

[physiol@health.wits.ac.za](mailto:physiol@health.wits.ac.za)

## Physiologists in the news

### PROMOTIONS/RECENT APPOINTMENTS

Dr JM van Rooyen in the School for Physiology, Nutrition and Consumer Science at North-West University has been promoted to Associate Professor.

Dr Rob Smith (from Hatter Institute, UCT) appointed to Dept of Physiological Sciences, Stellenbosch

### DEGREES

At Wits, Ms Noko Mphahlele, an associate lecturer, obtained her MSc with distinction. Mr Richard Brooksbank, a lecturer, obtained his PhD for his work on calcium-regulatory proteins in diseases of striated muscle.

### POSTGRADUATE STUDENT NEWS

Mr AJ Swanepoel at North-West University was awarded the prize for best student in Occupational Hygiene in Physiology.

Ms Lize Bruwer (current Hons student) at Stellenbosch awarded Merck medal for best undergrad over 3 years in the programme (Molecular and cellular Biology)

### RESEARCH

News from North-West University: Dr JM van Rooyen was awarded a C NRF rating. Dr AE Schutte has undertaken postdoctoral research at the Menzies School of Health Research in Australia. We wish her well.

From Stellenbosch: Dr R. Smith and Ms AM Engelbrecht both awarded Promising young

investigator awards from the Stellenbosch 2020 Fund.

Dr M. Senekal awarded ARP Walker prize for research in nutrition.

Prof Kathy Myburgh has been upgraded from C2 to C1 by NRF. Prof Myburgh has also recently been a guest editor for an edition of *Comparative Biochem & Physiology*. She has additionally written an introduction to a series of articles published in *Medicine Science Sports & Exercise*.

## Forthcoming conferences: IUPS 2005



*Sea World, San Diego*

Don't miss the 35th International Congress of Physiological Sciences, March 31 to April 5, 2005, San Diego, California. The meeting is being held in conjunction with the Experimental Biology 2005 meeting, April 2-6. One registration fee

provides access to both meetings.

Abstract submission deadline is Nov 3, 2004.

Early registration deadline is Feb 4, 2005.

For additional information, visit [www.iups2005.org](http://www.iups2005.org) or [www.faseb.org/meetings/e/b2005](http://www.faseb.org/meetings/e/b2005)

See you in San Diego for what promises to be a great meeting.

## Conference report-back

Physiologists from Wits, Stellenbosch, Kwazulu-Natal, Pretoria and several other institutions recently gathered at the beautiful Ntshondwe Camp, Ithala game reserve, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> **International Conference of Comparative Physiology and Biochemistry in Africa**, from 7-13 August 2004. Proceedings will be published in the Elsevier International Conference Series, volume 1275.

Dr HW Huisman and Mr Schutte from North-West presented talks at the 14<sup>th</sup> **European Meeting on Hypertension** held in France, from 13-17 June 2004. Dr JM van Rooyen delivered a presentation at the 20<sup>th</sup> Scientific Meeting of the **International Society of Hypertension**, from 15-19 Feb 2004 in Sao Paulo.

Dr Jaques van Rooyen: chairperson of organizing committee for the satellite ISHD congress in Kruger Park. A very successful and well organized international event, giving exposure to South African cardiac physiologists and allowing them to network with foreign experts on their "home turf".



Ithala game reserve – an idyllic conference venue

---

*"Halitosis is better than no breath at all."*  
Taken from Graffiti 2 by Nigel Rees.

## Positions available

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR / SENIOR LECTURER / LECTURER

In cardiovascular physiology at the University of North-West

For more information:

Contact: Prof NT Malan

Tel: (018) 299-2436.

POSTDOCTORAL POSITION

Research areas: cardiovascular physiology, sleep, pain, thermal physiology, or endocrinology.

For more information:

Contact: Prof A Woodiwiss

Tel: (011) 717-2363

POSTGRADUATE POSITIONS AVAILABLE

The Dept of Physiological Sciences, Stellenbosch University Main Campus has an open invitation for potential postgraduate students to apply for positions. Contact Prof Kathy Myburgh for further details.

DO YOU HAVE POSITIONS AVAILABLE?

To advertise academic positions, postdoctoral positions, or postgraduate student research opportunities, contact the editors. See last page of newsletter for contact details.

UPDATE

Did you know that the Dept of Physiological Sciences, Stellenbosch University, has recently moved back into a refurbished and renamed building (*Mike de Vries Building*). The building is named after a dean of Science who later became Rector of the University. Prof de Vries was a chemist in the 1960's and 1970's.

## Editorial team

Dr Kennedy Erlwanger

[erlwangerk@  
physiology.wits.ac.za](mailto:erlwangerk@physiology.wits.ac.za)

and

Dr Andrea Fuller

[fullera@  
physiology.wits.ac.za](mailto:fullera@physiology.wits.ac.za)

School of Physiology  
Wits University

Tel: 011-717-2363  
Fax: 011-643-2765

---

## PSSA on the Web!

Visit:

[http://www.sun.ac.za/  
medphys/pssa.htm](http://www.sun.ac.za/medphys/pssa.htm)

---

## Newsletter name

Did the title of this newsletter (PSSA Newsletter) call out to you and make you want to read the contents?

Probably not! We'd like you to help us choose a name for our newsletter.

Please send suggestions

to the editors by the end of October 2004.

## Would like to write for this newsletter?

Do you fancy yourself as a future Jared Diamond or Stephen Jay Gould? Even if you don't have similar formidable writing talent, we'd appreciate your contributions to this newsletter.

In particular, we invite contributions profiling

physiologists or physiology research, book reviews, feedback from conferences or any other news of general interest to PSSA members.

Also, if you'd like to sign up as a regular contributor, please let us know. We'd be very happy

to welcome you on-board.

We'd also like to get postgraduate students in the society involved. Please write to us, even if it's just to organise a boat race challenge at the next PSSA meeting!

## Who said marking was not a joke?

Those of you that have spent hours with exam scripts, decorating them with red ink will agree that marking is a tedious process. However every once in a while students write things that unintentionally tickle the funny bone. Here is a sample from Wits (Names have been withheld to maintain the integrity of our community of physiologists).

i. "Kwashiokor is the condition the second child gets when the first child is born".

ii. "To treat heart failure, give the patient a laxative which causes water and  $K^+$  loss".

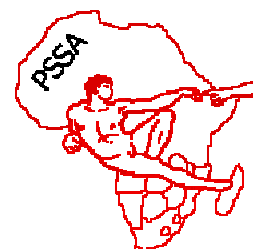
iii. "A rise in intra-cranial pressure causes sweating on the forehead".

iv. On why ear canal temperature is normally lower than rectal temperature:

A1. "mouth is usual open and rectum covered by clothes"

A2. "because there is more ventilation in the mouth than the rectum"

We would like to make this a regular column in the newsletter so please send us some excerpts of howlers you have come across in vivas, scripts, and the lecture theatres.



PHYSIOLOGY SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA