

keynotes

KEY CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH IN SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2008



contents

New website for parents of newborns 2

Researchers get fresh ideas thanks to travel scholarships 2

Professor Doreen Rosenthal honoured by colleagues and friends 3

Space for thinking nurtures researchers 3

PROFILE

Dr Carolyn Nickson 4

PUBLICATIONS 2007 5

STUDENT SUCCESS 6

CONFERENCE 7

STAFF AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS 7

STAFF MOVEMENTS 7

STAFF DEPARTURES 8

Key Centre Move 8

A New Director: New Directions

ON 14TH APRIL 2008 I took up my new role as Professor of Women's Health and Director of the Key Centre for Women's Health in Society. I am extremely excited about my appointment and very much look forward to working with you to improve the health of women in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.

For those of you who don't know me I am a medically-trained epidemiologist with specific expertise in social and cancer epidemiology. My research interests include health inequalities and breast cancer epidemiology.

I was appointed as an Associate Professor at the Key Centre in August 2004 and have enjoyed working closely with the former Director, Professor Doreen Rosenthal, and other Centre staff, in shaping an intellectually vibrant and policy and practice relevant teaching and research program. But there is still much to be done.

The Centre has made significant contributions to understanding a range of women's health problems including: mental health; reproductive and sexual health; use of health services; disability; experiences of women in the menopausal transition; intimate partner violence and many others. It is a timely juncture in the Centre's history to reflect on where we have been and develop a revitalised vision for the future.

Many of the issues that were with us 20 years ago are still with us today. To name just a few: intimate partner violence is a leading contributor to the burden of disease for women; abortion is still part of the Crimes Act and is not readily accessible for all women; and access to

appropriate reproductive and sexual health services and women's mental health and well being remain key priorities. However, new issues have also emerged that I believe warrant more intensive engagement by the Centre. One such issue is health inequalities, a particular passion of mine. Health inequalities are increasingly on the agendas of governments and non-government organisations in Australia and internationally.

The Centre can, and should, make contributions to these debates by bringing a critical eye to the significance of gender in generating inequalities in health, a perspective which has largely been absent from Australian research in this field. Traditionally social and economic inequalities have thought to be greater for men and not as relevant for women. Increasingly research is showing that women also experience these social and economic inequalities but perhaps in different ways and through different pathways than men. Gender is also critical to understanding the health of disadvantaged groups including indigenous Australians, newly arrived migrants and single parents, for example. This equity agenda can be progressed on many fronts including our work with service providers, such as the Royal Women's Hospital; intervention research and program evaluation; research on the determinants of women's health as well as descriptive research.

The policy environment is also ripe for change. There is a renewed focus on women's health. In the lead up to the federal election, the Australian Labor Party, promised to develop a new National Women's Health Policy; the Victorian Government has a strong focus on women's health and recently released its 'gender and diversity lens for health and human services'; and, internationally, the World Health Organization (WHO) continues to focus on women and gender; an example of this is the Women and Gender Equity Knowledge Network formed as part of the WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health.



continued on page 2

PICTURED Professor Anne Kavanagh



Researchers get fresh ideas thanks to travel scholarships

TWO KEY CENTRE STAFF AND ONE PHD CANDIDATE are the first to benefit from the generosity of the Harold Mitchell Foundation travel fellowship program.

The Key Centre has been given \$50,000 to distribute over five years to staff and students. Each year, a staff member and student will be granted \$5,000 each to travel overseas.

In 2007 PhD candidate Lukar Thornton visited the Netherlands (Erasmus MC) and the US (Harvard University) to meet with colleagues working on other projects similar to the Victorian Lifestyle Neighbourhood and Environment Study, and to attend the American Public Health Association conference. "My time at Harvard provided me with a unique chance to work with one of the world's leading public health department and going to the conference allowed me to interact with some of the world's best known public health researchers."

PhD candidate Sudirman Nasir, will travel to Barcelona Spain to participate at the International Harm Reduction Conference, in November 2008. Sudirman will also visit The Netherlands and the UK to meet with collaborators and with experts in the fields of HIV, drugs and prevention programs.

In mid 2008, NHMRC post doctoral research fellow Louise Keogh is heading to Chicago for the American Society of Clinical Oncologists meeting, (ASCO), and is presenting a paper titled 'Australian physicians and chemoprevention for women at high familial risk for breast cancer'. She is also planning to visit the Centre for Excellence in Women's Health in Chicago.

Later in 2008 senior lecturer Jane Hocking will travel to Switzerland and the UK to investigate chlamydia epidemiology and control. She will also meet with policy makers to learn about the design and management of the National Chlamydia Screening Program in the United Kingdom.

Further details at www.haroldmitchellfoundation.com.au

continued from page 1

I believe the Key Centre can, and should, make significant contributions to these policy deliberations. Realising this vision requires increased engagement with our stakeholders including government, non-government organisations, advocacy groups and women

New website for parents of newborns

WHAT WERE WE THINKING? is a question asked by many parents as they adjust to life with a new baby.

Many report that it is difficult to find information and practical guidance about ways to establish sustainable new patterns of daily life. There are two very common difficulties which contribute to fatigue and diminished confidence: persistent and inconsolable infant crying and managing the greatly increased workload fairly. Now a website for new parents has been launched by Key Centre researchers Associate Professor Jane Fisher and Dr Heather Rowe.

It is one of the outcomes of "PEPP, Living Well with a New Baby" a research project supported by beyondblue, the Victorian Centre for Excellence in Depression and Related Disorders and the Australian Government's Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs' Invest to Grow scheme. The project is testing whether a one-day seminar providing timely information and opportunities to learn new skills for mothers and fathers with a first new baby promotes confidence and prevents distress.

The website was developed by interactive multi media designer Penny Harris with her team: Lara Cameron and Patrick Fitzgerald and was made possible with a grant from the Jack Brockhoff Foundation.

"The website contains information and activities derived from research evidence, and the experiences of parents and health professionals to assist mothers and fathers with a first baby. It is attractive and accessible with resources that can be downloaded or used interactively. The website exemplifies knowledge translation," said Associate Professor Fisher.

The website has two sections. About Babies addresses:

- infant temperament, including differences in the reactivity, responsivity and regulation of young infants and how to recognise these and tailor caretaking;

themselves. In the coming months, we will undertake broad consultations with key stakeholders to help us create an innovative policy and practice relevant research and training agenda. We are keen to hear your views during this process.

- amount and known reasons for infant crying, including the contribution in our cultural context, of over-stimulation;
- infant sleep needs and optimal sleep habits and the use of settling strategies to achieve these while supporting breastfeeding.

The second part About Mothers and Fathers focuses on matters relating to the new unpaid workload of infant care and household work and developing strategies to address these in non-confrontational ways including:

- naming, acknowledging and negotiating the workload;
- gendered differences in the losses and gains of parenthood;
- the lasting psychological impact of adverse reproductive events;
- understanding how family formation can be influenced by experiences from each parent's family of origin, and
- our universal needs for additional practical and emotional support while caring for babies.

"Most education for new parents occurs during pregnancy and most men are expected to attend these classes and the birth. However, when the baby arrives it often becomes "women's business". This site involves fathers in creating the new family in the early weeks of life with a first baby" says Dr Heather Rowe.

The site also contains, in a separate section, worksheets and facilitator notes for health professionals to implement these activities into

existing health promotion programs for parents of newborns, which can be downloaded and printed.

The creators are keen to get feedback from users of the site and a moderated blog allows for comments. Zara, the mother of an 8 month old baby says: "I love the worksheets for parents. It makes

me realise how hard I work each day and that without sleep of course I am a zombie. My partner thinks that I should do what his mother did – all the housework, all the cooking, all the washing and keeping the baby happy, but he also wants me to earn a living, which his Mum never did. This website will help us talk about these things without fighting."

www.whatwerewethinking.org.au/



*PICTURED
PEPP Launch Dr H Rowe, Prof B Barnett,
A/Prof Jane Fisher*

Professor Doreen Rosenthal honoured by colleagues and friends

THE ENERGY, LEADERSHIP AND VISION OF RETIRING CENTRE DIRECTOR PROFESSOR DOREEN ROSENTHAL was celebrated with admiration and a good dose of laughter at her University Festschrift in April.

Professor Pat Grimshaw of the School of Historical Studies, and a long-time colleague and friend of Doreen, chaired the event while Professor Bruce Singh, Deputy Dean of Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, and representing the Dean, noted the active role of the Key Centre under Doreen's leadership and indicated that the Faculty considered women's health a key priority.

Professor Terry Nolan, Head, Melbourne School of Population Health, spoke of how Doreen helped and promoted the integration of the new School, including the two years she acted as his deputy, literally sitting at his right hand to ensure her views were not overlooked in meetings.

Associate Professor Anne Mitchell (Director, Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria, Australian Research Centre in

Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS), La Trobe University) spoke of Doreen's drive and vision in setting up ARCSHS in the early 1990s where she was creative and willing to take risks in order to conduct innovative and relevant research. She set up the Community Liaison Unit at the Centre as a way of advancing issues about sexual health. She envisaged knowledge transfer long before it was fashionable setting up the Community Liaison Unit at the Centre whose explicit aim was to work with communities and other stakeholders to achieve widespread dissemination of research.

Doreen's son, Professor Mark Rosenthal, Director of Medical Oncology at the Royal Melbourne Hospital provoked laughter when he recalled how Doreen embarrassed him and his siblings Jo and Simon with discussions of sex during her TV appearances. He also paid tribute to her mentoring qualities as an academic.

Professor Pip Pattison, Professor of Psychology and President, Academic Board, reflected on Doreen's early work in the Department of Psychology in the 1980's, where she not only brought a deep commitment to high quality teaching and research, but also a sense of theatricality as a resident "Aquadizyack".

Dr Shelley Mallett, formerly of Key Centre, spoke of Doreen as a mentor and friend who advised on intellectual pursuits as well as fashion. Her forthright approach to collaborative writing, replacing several long words with one short one wherever possible, was greatly respected.

Professor Anne Kavanagh, recently appointed as Director of the Key Centre, also mentioned Doreen's role as an academic mentor as well as an exemplar of catching attire. She also noted Doreen's role in the establishment of the Key Centre, where she, Pat Grimshaw, and others, acted as sounding boards and advisors on the original application, by the first Director, Professor Lorraine Dennerstein, to the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, to set up the Key Centre.



Professor Doreen Rosenthal



Doreen, pictured (centre) as one of the "Aquadizyacks", during her time in the Department of Psychology. Dr Maggie Kirkman (left) and A/Professor Virginia Holmes (right).

Space for thinking nurtures researchers

Having the time and mental space to immerse yourself in research projects and write up study findings is a luxury for many health service-based clinicians and it's something that Dr Chris Bayly has enjoyed enormously during her six months at the Key Centre.

Chris is Associate Director of Women's Services at the Royal Women's Hospital and has just finished her sabbatical.

"Its been great just to have the time and space to bounce ideas around and talk to researchers rather than just quickly jot down a reference during a busy day in clinic and then hope that you'll come back to it later on," she says.

"It's not terribly easy to do clinical work and substantial research at the same time."

During her time at the Key Centre, Chris has spent time writing up for publication her own research which was done as part of a Masters in Public Health. The interview – and multi based study looked at the experience of doctors who care for women from diverse backgrounds. She has also taken part in the abortion conference and the multi agency declaration that has come from that event. She has also collaborated with Dr Jane Hocking and others on a research proposal to examine the health impacts of Chlamydia infection. Chris is also an investigator on the project looking the provision of pregnancy advisory services across Victoria.

"One of the main reasons I wanted to come here was to improve my research skills and strengthen the important links between the Women's and the Key Centre. It is very important to the hospital that we have a strong research culture and that we continue to be engaged in the many collaborations we have with Key Centre researchers."

Chris would like to see joint appointments between the Women's and the Key Centre to allow for greater interaction between clinicians and researchers.



Dr Chris Bayly

→ PROFILE

Dr Carolyn Nickson Research Fellow

Epidemiologist Carolyn Nickson has just been awarded her PhD in which she developed a simulation model of Australia's BreastScreen program. Her work estimated whether reducing screening intervals in the screening program can improve cancer detection for women with high breast density. Since 2003 Caz has worked part-time at the Key Centre on a number of research projects while completing her PhD, and she is now undertaking a number of studies about breast and cervical cancer screening.

What are you working on at the moment?

At the Key Centre I'm working on a new case-control study linking breast cancer deaths with exposure to breast cancer screening. Our aim is to work out the mortality benefit of breast cancer screening in Australia – ie how many deaths have been prevented by screening. I also work remotely for the Cancer Council of NSW helping to develop a model that simulates cervical cancer screening in light of the HPV vaccination program.

What excites you about the work?

Pushing my thinking, finding solutions to problems, seeing people around me make things happen, collaborating with big brains, finding excuses to browse the library microfiche collection.

And what frustrates you?

Funding insecurity, short-term contracts, the hierarchical nature of academia ...it takes some resilience and determination to stick it out and I've seen some great researchers give up in frustration.

Who has inspired you?

Throughout my PhD studies I presented my research-in-progress to potential sponsors for the National Breast Cancer Foundation Mothers Day Classic Fun Run – my scholarship was raised entirely through the Fun Run so I'm very grateful to anyone who has participated in that. I was really inspired by the fundraisers and sponsors...so many people have their own stories about being touched by cancer (including me) and no two stories are the same. Such people invest loads of energy and faith in researchers coming up with good and useful answers, and thinking of them really helped me through some hurdles.

Tell us a bit about your career path. How did you become an epidemiologist?

Well, I very nearly became a secondary teacher of maths and drama in 1993, which probably wouldn't have been too bad. Instead, I dropped out of the course before I finished, distracted by poverty and helping to organise leftist protests and being a dramatic young woman. I worked as a public servant at the Refugee Review Tribunal for a few years, then I returned to uni to complete a degree in maths, dashing between lectures and part-time admin jobs on campus. I was working for David Legge at the School of Public Health at La Trobe when he encouraged me to get some training in epidemiology and biostatistics. The rest is history.

I think epidemiologists need a TV show like CSI or Numbers to make our field seem more exciting and immediate and sexy. I sometimes work by lamplight and get a thrill from a new finding – my fantasy would be complete if I could then step outside the office to share my joy with a team of shiny people ready to take my finding and use it, perhaps with a scene-cut to some person experiencing an improvement in their

health. In truth, much of my work is based on faith that the abstraction of the world that I am working with is real enough to have meaning, and that I'm part of a wave of findings that will bring about change.

If you could change one thing in your life?

I'd find a way to do the same work without spending my days sitting at a computer.

If you weren't working at the Key Centre what would you be doing?

I'm a frustrated singer/guitarist...I'd be wearing a sequined frock and doing some Nina Simone covers. And I just love the bush so I'll probably end up as some over-educated diva hogging the pub stage in a country town, singing tunes about the relative risk of a broken heart and the absolute risk of it tearing us apart. For now, it's probably best for everyone if I stick to the research.

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continued on page 6

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→ STUDENT SUCCESS

THE FOLLOWING DEGREES HAVE BEEN AWARDED:

PhD

Paul Michael MYERS Hepatitis C testing among young people who experience homelessness in Melbourne

Narelle WARREN Markers of midlife: interrogating health, illness and ageing in rural Australia

Sartiah YUSRAN Developing sexuality and reproductive health education for secondary schools in Makassar: a need assessment

Doctor of Public Health

Victoria TEAM Health and caregiving experiences of Russian-speaking women migrants

Master of Public Health with Research Report in Women's Health

Rachel BONNICI The availability and effectiveness of specialised antenatal care programs for Indigenous communities: A systematic review

Julia LEINWEBER The costs of 'being with the woman' - Secondary Traumatic Stress in Midwifery

Catherine Mary MAYES Understanding the impact of the grey legal status of abortion in Victoria on women's access to abortion

Master of Women's Health with Research Report in Women's Health

Ann Bronwen ALDER A review of published midwifery research

Cameryn GARRETT Being an XY female: An analysis of accounts from the website of the Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome Support Group

Ornwipa RUGKHLA Condom use and STI rates in female sex workers who attended the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre between 2004 and 2007

Master of Women's Health by Coursework

Karin **BUTLER**

Shukrya **NASRAH**

Josephine Foong Yin **WONG**

Master of Medicine (Women's Health) by Coursework

Meike **MAGNASOFA**

Postgraduate Diploma in Women's Health

Anna Kristen **BUTLINSKI**

→ CONFERENCE

KEY CENTRE LEADS ON ABORTION LAW REFORM

MPs and policy makers are the focus of a campaign to raise awareness about abortion law reform and improving access to services. The conference 'Abortion in Victoria (2007): Where are we now? Where do we want to go?' was held at The University of Melbourne and hosted by the Key Centre, The Royal Women's Hospital, Family Planning Victoria and Women's Health in November 2007.

A 14-point Melbourne Declaration demanding better access to quality family planning, abortion and sexual health services was endorsed by participants at the conference. It calls for abortion to be removed from the Victorian Crimes Act and for it to be accessible in the same way as other surgical procedures.

Chair of the conference organising committee, KCWHS Research Fellow Dr Louise Keogh, said it was unique to have agreement from so many key players on such a controversial issue.

"We are putting out a challenge to the Victorian Government to see abortion law reform as the first step in improving women's health rather than an end in itself," says Dr Keogh.

"This document should be used as a blueprint for planning abortion services for the future. Our aim should be to offer women 'world's best practice' in abortion services, as it should be in every area of medicine."

In an opinion piece on the Centre's website, Dr Keogh states: "When a diverse group of people like this comes together on a medical issue and suggest the way forward, the Government should take notice."

The Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) has released its recommendations on potential changes to the legal status of abortion in Victoria. The State government is yet to respond to the VLRC and announce the timetable for the release of a White Paper on the issue.

For further information see: <http://www.kcwhs.unimelb.edu.au/news/conferences>

→ STAFF AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Research Fellow **Louise Keogh** and colleagues have received a \$35,000 grant from the Faculty of Medicine Dentistry and Health Sciences for a pilot study titled, "Translation of genetic knowledge to clinical practice: a novel approach for more cost-effective BRCA1 mutation screening." Other collaborators include Genetics (Professor Ingrid Winship), Pathology (Dr Melissa Southey), Centre for MEGA Epidemiology (Professor John Hopper, Dr Mark Jenkins), Key Centre for Women's Health in Society (Dr Louise Keogh), The Cancer Council Victoria (Professor Graham Giles), Genetic Health Services Victoria (Clara Gaff), Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre (Stephen Fox), Western Hospital (Chris Dow)

Dr Deb Keys, research fellow is embarking on a collaboration with The Association for Research on Mothering, York University and other Canadian and international researchers. This work titled "Mother Centres, feminist pedagogy and young motherhood; creating empowerment programming for young mothers" is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Ahsan Maqbool Ahmad, Lukar Thornton, Carolyn Nickson, and Catherine Mayes were all recipients of the Key Centre's student support bursary of \$1000.

The National Heart Foundation has awarded Key Centre researchers \$124,151 for a project titled "Environmental predictors of biomarkers of cardiovascular disease & diabetes heart." The work to be led by **Professor Anne Kavanagh** and involves collaborators from the International Diabetes Institute, University of Queensland and Monash University.

→ STAFF MOVEMENTS

New Staff

Fulya Torun joined the Key Centre in March this year as the Assistant to the Director, Professor Anne Kavanagh. Fulya has a background in administration and office management and has been employed in various administrative roles at the University over the past 14 years. Since 2001 she has been personal assistant to the Head of Department and Managing Director of the Department of Ophthalmology, Centre for Eye Research Australia. She brings with her skills of executive assistance, extensive knowledge of grant application procedures and event management.

Turi Berg is a research assistant working on the REPIT (Randomized Early Parenting Intervention Trial) project and PATPA (Parental Age & Transition to Parenthood Australia) study. Turi has traveled extensively in South America, India, Ethiopia and Kenya. She completed her post graduate studies in international health and a Masters in Public Health in 2006.

Dr Karen Wynter is research assistant undertaking quantitative analysis on a number of reproductive mental health projects at the Key Centre. She has a background in psychology and did her post graduate study in education at the University of Cambridge. Since completing her PhD she conducted research for several mathematics education projects before being appointed General Manager for SPSS South Africa. At the Key Centre, Karen is responsible for managing and analyzing complex data sets.

Dr Sonia Young is research fellow and was appointed in early 2008 to manage the early parenting study (REPIT). Sonia began her academic life in medical science research. Her PhD, from the University of Adelaide, investigated a receptor tyrosine kinase involved in leukaemia and she has since worked at the Hanson Institute where she investigated the mechanisms contributing to the development and progression of leukaemia. While travelling overseas, Sonia developed an appreciation of the social determinants of health and has completed a graduate certificate of primary health care at Flinders University.

Key Centre on the move

In June 2008 the Key Centre will be relocating from the Royal Women's Hospital to new University offices on the 2nd floor 723 Swanston St. Here it will join another centre in the Melbourne School of Population Health, Centre for Molecular, Environmental, Genetic and Analytic Epidemiology; it will also be closer to the School located around the corner at 207 Bouverie St. The Centre will continue to collaborate closely with the Royal Women's Hospital.

The Centre's postal address and URL will remain unchanged. Please check the website for details of new phone numbers:

Key Centre for Women's Health in Society
Melbourne School of Population Health
The University of Melbourne
Australia 3010
<http://www.kcwhs.unimelb.edu.au/>

→ STAFF DEPARTURES

After five years at the Key Centre **Dr Shelley Mallett** is leaving to join Melbourne City Mission as general manager of the research and social policy unit. Shelley has worked as a research fellow, senior lecturer and Research Director of Project i, the longitudinal study of youth homelessness. "My time here has been very fulfilling and I've had the opportunity to do some wonderful research with great colleagues. I hope to keep up my connections with the university through research projects and my honorary position in The Melbourne School of Population Health," said Shelley. "I'm grateful to VicHealth for their support during my fellowship period."

Shelley is co-writing (with Doreen Rosenthal, Deb Keys and Roger Averill) a text about homelessness based on the findings of Project i. The book, titled "Moving out, moving on" will be published by Routledge in 2009.

Katie Symes, was executive assistant to the previous Centre Director Professor Doreen Rosenthal since March 2005 has taken up a new position as Knowledge Transfer Officer, Advancement and Communications Unit in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences.

Ms Lauren Matheson completed her two year contract in November 2007 as project manager for the PEPP Project, leaving to take up a position in Ethiopia as a Health Information Officer with the International Rescue Committee. Lauren came to the Key Centre to study and complete a Master's in Women's Health after undergraduate studies in her native Canada.

Atlanta Zwar job-shared with Katie Symes throughout 2007 and provided a high level of administrative support to the Director. She left in February 2008 to have her second child.

Daria Bodzak began working as part-time manager for the PEPP project in late 2007, but unfortunately resigned in early April to return to Canada for family reasons. Before leaving she continued the work of Lauren Matheson in training a team of casual staff on the PEPP project.

Helen Rawson resigned in February 2008 to move to the Middle East with her family. She made a valuable contribution in her year with the Centre, both in project managing the NHMRC-funded Randomized Early Parenting Intervention Trial (REPIT), and in her participation in the general activities of the Centre. In this time she also completed her PhD.

Jenny Cope provided valuable administrative support to Associate Professor Anne Kavanagh and her team in her 12 months at the Key Centre. She left in early 2008 to have her third child.

Research Fellow and biostatistician **Lyndal Thomas** completed her contract with the Centre in February 2008; she was part of the Australian Health Inequities Program team and while at the Centre worked on the Victorian Lifestyle and Neighbourhood Environments Study.

Anne-Maree Polimeni, Research Fellow, resigned in May 2008, to take up a senior research position at Odyssey House — a key service provider for people affected by drug and alcohol problems. During her time at the Centre, Anne-Maree worked with Professor Anne Kavanagh and colleagues on the Victorian Lifestyle and Neighbourhood Environments Study and on a National Heart Foundation Grant which examined the significance of local environments for chronic disease.



Online course information www.sph.unimelb.edu.au/postgrad/courseshandbook/courses/

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keynotes newsletter

PUBLISHED BY: Key Centre for Women's Health in Society, Melbourne School of Population Health, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, The University of Melbourne

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