

HEALTH AND THE FAMILY

A B r i e f O v e r v i e w

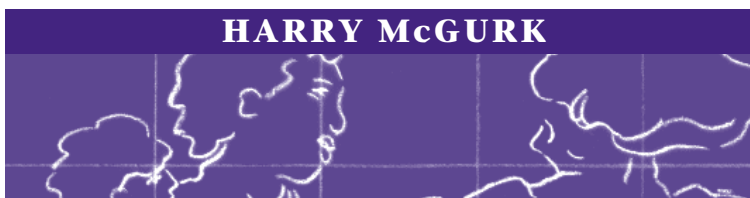
The Sixth International Symposium sponsored by the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund (ARHRF) was held at University House, Australian National University, Canberra, on May 23–25 1966. The purpose of the symposium was to establish a framework within which an agenda could be established

for a research initiative on 'Health and the Family', to be funded by the ARHRF over the 1966–69 triennium.

Participants in the invitational symposium included family and health researchers with national and international reputations in medical, psychiatric, psychological and social science research. They also included representatives from government and community policy makers, service managers and service providers. To have people from such diverse backgrounds present at the symposium was deliberate strategy on the part of the organisers, intended to foster communication and collaboration between stakeholders with shared interests in the field of family health research but whose approaches to the issues derive from different perspectives.

Over the two and a half working days of the symposium 28 papers were presented on an extensive and comprehensive range of research topics related to issues of family functioning and family health and wellbeing. Keynote addresses were delivered by Professor James Anglin from the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada; Professor Dina Krauskopf of the University of Costa Rica; Dr Irma Kurtz, a Public Health Consultant from the United Kingdom, and Professor Harry McGurk, Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Professor Anglin presented a comprehensive account, from an international perspective, of relationships between the health



of individuals and of the families to which they belong, in the course of which he drew interesting parallels between the ways in which the indigenous peoples of North America and of Australia are seeking to reassert the value of traditional concepts of family and community health and wellbeing.

In her paper, Professor Krauskopf spoke of the need for families and communities to promote the optimum physical, social and psychological development of the young people in their midst as insurance against their alienation, detachment and loss of hope.

The presentation by Dr Kurtz was devoted to consideration, from a public health perspective, of what communities and societies need to do to counteract the prevailing promotion, throughout Western society, of individual success and wellbeing at the expense of the wellbeing of families and communities.

My own presentation stressed the need for a multidisciplinary, coordinated research program on personal and family health and wellbeing. The paper urged that such an approach should be based on an inclusive definition of families and on an integrative concept of health which embraced social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as the mental and physical status of individuals and their families. It argued also that the success of such a program would be enhanced by researchers, funding agencies, policy makers and practitioners working together at

all stages of its development, implementation and dissemination.

A number of recurrent themes emerged from the papers presented during the symposium.

- One theme was the significance of families as the primary provider of health care, health education and illness prevention in contemporary society.

- A second was the importance of multilevel approaches to the investigation of family health. It is important to study the health of individuals and their families in the context of the personal, neighbourhood, cultural, societal and political factors that impinge upon health and wellbeing. Thus, research effort requires to be invested simultaneously and coordinately from clinical, social, attitudinal, moral and policy perspectives. Only in this way can the complex interactions between values, ideology, policy, socio-economic structure, social cohesion, family functioning, family health and wellbeing be unravelled and understood.

- A third theme, related to the second, involved relationships between individuals, communities and governments and their respective roles and responsibilities concerning the health and wellbeing of families. Here it was stressed that in the planning of health services to meet the needs of families, both they and their individual members must be thought of as *citizens* embedded in a network of corporate and mutual expectations, obligations, rights and responsibilities, rather than as individual *clients or customers* of a business enterprise called government.

A U S T R A L I A N R O T A R Y H E A L T H R E S E A R C H F U N D



The Australian Rotary Health Research Fund had great pleasure in convening its 6th International Symposium in Canberra on 23–25 May 1966. The theme of 'Health and Family' was explored in depth by the 30 plus participants, all of whom are leaders and experts in the area of health and family studies. The results of the Symposium will prove to be valuable to the Fund as it shapes the research agenda for the investment of over \$1.7 million over the next triennium in the arena of family health.

Readers may be interested to know a little more about the activities of the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund. The Fund was established by Rotarians in the

early 1980s and soon became a National Community Service Program of Australia supported by all Rotary Clubs and Districts within the nation.

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The first grants were made in 1986 (\$100,552) and the total grants to date exceed \$3.8 million. Prior to entry with the research field of 'Family Health' in 1996, our previous fields of research trienniums have been 'Cot Death', 'Environment Problems of the Aged', and 'Adolescent Health'.

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secretariat being located at Parramatta. The Board relies on expert advice and recommendations from an independent Research Committee comprising up to ten eminent medical professionals from around Australia who, apart from the Chairman, are all non-Rotarians.

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Rotarians are proud of the progress of the

- Resilience and vulnerability were repeatedly referred to in the context of family health; whereas some families are able to withstand and overcome adversity, others succumb under apparently similar conditions. However, the importance of conceptualising family and individual resilience and vulnerability as fluctuating processes rather than continuous states was a fourth recurrent theme. The research task here is to develop reliable methods for assessing resilience and vulnerability so that resilience can be promoted, and families sustained when they are doing well, and provided with respite when they become vulnerable.
- The fifth major theme to emerge at the symposium was concerned with the importance of clinical practice, health education and health promotion, including the planning of the latter, being evidence led and evidence based.
- A sixth and final theme referred to the need, when reflecting on the nature of family health, to think beyond the families bounded by households to embrace multi-generation families. The current tendency, in advocacy, policy and practice, to compartmentalise generations and genders could have the effect of putting advocates of women's health and men's health, advocates of the health of children, of young people and of the aged in competition with each other to the detriment of all. What is needed is a comprehensive focus of the health of families based on recognition of the changing needs of different members of families across the life course.

The papers selected for publication in this issue of *Family Matters* reflect the range of issues addressed during the symposium; they illustrate the themes identified above, and highlight also some of the issues that arise when health is considered in the context of families.

Harry McGurk is the Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

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Naturally, our aim is to be a major supporter of vital health research 'by Australians for Australians', which will in time improve the health and wellbeing of all Australians.

If you would like further information, or if you have any suggestions, please contact Joy Gillett, Secretary, Australian Rotary Health Research Fund, 30 PO Box 779, Parramatta, New South Wales 2124. Telephone (02) 633 4888. Fax: (02) 891 5984.

– S. Bruce McKenzie
Chairman



PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE ROTARY SYMPOSIUM

The following is a complete list of papers presented at the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund 6th International Symposium in Canberra on 23–25 May 1996. For copies of individual papers, contact Ms Joy Gillett, Secretary, Australian Rotary Health Research Fund, PO Box 779, Parramatta, New South Wales 2124. Phone: (02) 633 4888. Fax: (02) 891 5984.

Author/s Title	
James P. Anglin	From Family and Health to Family Health: Implications for Research Policy and Practice
Lesley Barclay Jenny Fenwick	Forming Families: The Hidden Distress
John Brennan	How Does Family Violence and Neglect Give Rise to Aggressive Behaviour Disorders in Children? Implications of Research into Neural Regulation of Emotion and the Role of Early Experience
Edmond Chiu Alison Gray Sue Mansie	Agony, Ecstasy or Steady as she goes? – Family well-being and predictive testing in Huntington's Disease
Coleen Clare	Family Health Through Supporting Relationships: The Commonwealth's Family Services Program
Jenny Dean Andrea Knott	Family Statistics over Time: Adding the Fourth Dimension
Margaret Dean	Research Requirements for the Implementation of the National Health Policy for Children and Young People
Helen Disney * Gail Bateman Beth Seddon	Healthy Families and Relationships: Challenges for families, practitioners and researchers
Alan Hayes	Family Coping in Context: The Interplay of Vulnerability and Resilience
Ernest Hunter *	Continuities and discontinuities of care: Denial, rationalisation and trivialisation of state intrusion into Aboriginal family life
David W. Kissane Maria McKenzie	Promoting Healthy Family Functioning during Palliative Care and Bereavement
Dina Krauskopf	Critical Approaches to the Role of the Family during the Period of Adolescence
Zarrina Kurtz	Protecting and Promoting Mental Health in Families: What Works and Why
John Mathews	Early Family Influences on Aboriginal Health
Harry McGurk	Health in the Context of Families
Maria McKenzie David W. Kissane Dean P. McKenzie Patrick Onghena	Methodological Problems with Perceptions of Family Functioning
Timothy Moore *	Promoting the Healthy Functioning of Young Children with Developmental Disabilities and their Families: The Evolution of Theory and Research
Don Nutbeam	Young People who drop out of School: Risks and Reasons
John Pearn	Ethical Issues in Family Research
Beverley Raphael * Titia Sprague	Mental Health and Prevention for Families
M.S. Reed * C.A. Wraith D.L. Bennett	Families, Young People and Health Care: A Timely Alliance
Doreen Rosenthal	Parents as sex educators – Do they? Can they? Should they?
Michael Sawyer * Nicola Spurrier	Families, Parents and Chronic Childhood Illness
Stephen Zubrick Sven Silburn	Methods, Measures and Estimates in the Study of Families
Rhonda Small	Transcultural issues in mental health research: assessing maternal depression in the Mothers in a New Country (MINC) Project
Fiona Stanley	Unravelling Cycles of Disadvantage: The Role of Intergenerational and Sibship Data
John Toumbourou Anne Blyth John Bamburg	Preventing adolescent drug related harm through parental skills training
Ruth Weston	Health and Wellbeing of Parents and Young People in Non-English Speaking Families

* Edited version of paper published in this issue of *Family Matters*.

Papers from the Rotary Symposium published in *Family Matters* were selected by a three-member editorial panel comprising: Dr Harry McGurk, Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies; Dr Stephen Zubrick, Head, Division of Psychosocial Research, TVW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research; and Mr Sven Silburn, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, TVW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, University of Western Australia. Dr Zubrick is a Member of the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund Research Committee, and Convenor of the Symposium.

AUSTRALIAN ROTARY HEALTH RESEARCH FUND



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