

# Franklin Women

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## July 2018 Newsletter

This month I have had a few special conversations. Conversations with people who know of me through Franklin Women – a few of them I know quite well and others I had never met before. What made these conversations special is that these people reached out to me with the sole intention of giving me some words of kindness. Like many of you I am sure, I'm not good at receiving compliments and my usual response is to deflect kind words or attribute feedback to someone or something else. But, I have prepared a response I now want to use when (hopefully) this situation arises again... 'Thank you'. These [\*acts of kindness\*](#) gave me a much-needed boost of confidence and provided me with motivation to keep going (and made me feel *really* happy!). What a wonderful thing to do for another person.

In this month's newsletter the FW team are asking each of you for a small act of kindness. We are hoping you can take 2 minutes to share with us the impact FW has had on you, your career, your professional environment – anything at all – as big as a new career connection or even a new job, or as simple and important as a feeling of belonging from our events, or a few laughs from our newsletter. Whatever it is will be invaluable in helping us share the story of Franklin Women with other members, future partners and potential funders in the months to come.

And they will also make us really happy 😊 We hope you enjoy this month's newsletter.

Melina and the FW team

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## What happened this month

- Applications for [\*Cicada Innovations' Project XX\*](#) are now open, designed to encourage females to pursue a career in STEM
- The Medical Research Future Fund [\*2018–2020 Priorities Consultation\*](#) is now open
- New guidelines for [\*responsible and robust research\*](#) have been agreed upon by the NHMRC and the ARC
- Guidelines for the new [\*NHMRC Fellowship schemes\*](#) are now available
- The MCC [\*Backlash and Buy-in: Responding to the challenges in achieving gender equality\*](#) report has been released
- Winners of the [\*Sydney Research Awards and Scholarships\*](#) were announced – congratulations to all!

- A government funding investment of \$25 million was announced to [support Indigenous girls and women in STEM](#)
- In response to a government inquiry into research funding, issues regarding support for the [indirect costs of research](#) have been raised
- [#LancetWomen](#) has released an update highlighting *Lancet* publications on issues related to gender equity and the advancement of women in science, medicine and global health – we can't wait to see the full *Lancet* special issue early next year



## Career Profile

Meet [Suellen Nicholson](#), Senior Medical Scientist and laboratory head at the Infectious Diseases Serology Laboratory at the Doherty Institute. Suellen is a passionate supporter of public health and global health. She is a member of [Women in Science Parkville Precinct](#) (WiSPP) and enjoys fitness, art and travel.



**What is your training in the health or medical science field?** I completed a BSc in Biological Science at La Trobe University, majoring in microbiology and biochemistry. I was offered honours in biochem but really wanted to do it in micro. I was also thinking about working in public health more than in research so I decided to get a job and defer honours for a year. After applying for 50 jobs and getting nowhere, one day, after I'd donated blood at the Red Cross Blood Bank, I enquired about a job on the way out. It just so happened they needed three new scientists to start screening the blood for HIV and that was in 1985. I applied for the job and got it! So I started my career because of HIV.

After 2 years, I moved to Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital in the National Hepatitis Laboratory, a few years later we merged with the State HIV Reference Lab, and finally with the general serology lab. By the time all the mergers happened, I'd had experience in diagnostic serology for over 40 different organisms!

**Tell us about your role, and how you got to be in charge of a laboratory?** Our lab includes the State HIV Reference Laboratory and the WHO Regional Reference Laboratory for Measles and Rubella (Western Pacific Region), and we are part of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Viral Hepatitis.

Back in the early days when I'd only been working for 4 years, my boss, who was only in her early 40s, was diagnosed with a serious illness. So at quite a young age I was placed in charge of the hepatitis and HIV lab. I had a fantastic mentor at the time, Professor Ian Gust, who was the director of the department, and he encouraged me and gave me opportunities

to develop. I did this role for 18 months and then sadly my boss passed away. Her job was advertised but I didn't apply for it, partly because I knew I wanted to try and start a family but also I felt I didn't have enough experience behind me. Eventually I did have children and then worked part-time for 15 years. When my youngest child started high school, the job for lab head came up. I really had to think about whether I wanted to stay part-time or go for it! I knew if I didn't go for it then I may not get another chance. So I applied for it, it was my first interview in 27 years and here I am today.

***What is one of your favourite projects you are currently working on?*** It's a project with WHO trying to set up a Viral Hepatitis Laboratory Network in the Western Pacific Region, and we're the first region globally to do so. This is a huge task but with approximately 350 million people infected worldwide with viral hepatitis it's long overdue. I was fortunate enough to go on the first mission to Mongolia last year. With the help of interpreters, we ran a number of workshops. We were able to assess lab capacity, compare different labs, identify gaps so we could provide guidance to WHO and the Mongolian Ministry of Health about where funding and education are most required. I find this work extremely satisfying and, although it's a cliché, you really feel like you can make a difference.

***What are some of the major 'outputs' from your work?*** My outputs vary across a broad range: interpreting complicated or unusual HIV test results for clinicians, educating doctors about serology, presenting project results, travelling overseas to assess laboratories for WHO, speaking at conferences or meetings, active membership of [WiSPP](#), and trying to enlighten others about the world of public and global health. It's really hard to pinpoint a major output – I feel like they're all equally important just in different ways.

***How do you think your work contributes to the field and/or the overall health of the community?*** We are a diagnostic lab so our test results directly affect the patients' clinical care. A couple of examples: we are the state lab for HIV so we perform all the confirmatory testing for Victoria. As part of our WHO measles and rubella work we prepare and distribute a Proficiency Test Panel to 280 labs globally to assess their reliability in testing for acute measles and rubella. I am also on the Royal College of Pathologists Serology Advisory Committee.

***Do you have any side interests or passions that you are looking to develop?*** I am really enjoying photography at the moment and experimenting with different effects and editing. I used to paint, but given my time constraints at the moment, photography is satisfying my creative side!

***What have you eaten too much of in your life?*** It's probably Turkish delight! I really love it and have been given a 1kg box for birthdays and Christmas. People seem to love or hate Turkish delight, and given that there's six in my family, it's really good because most of them hate it!

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# Franklin Women plan strategically

*Earlier this month we brought the [Franklin Women Peer Advisory Group \(FWPAG\)](#) together for one of our bi-annual Strategic Planning Days. This is important for us to take time out from our day-to-day activities and event planning to focus on big picture thinking. Here Team member [Amy](#) shares some of the happenings from the day and asks you for your feedback on the impact of FW:*



1. Our Vision and Mission have always been important to us here at FW (you may like to read more about them on [our website](#)). These, along with our guiding values to be innovative, influential, inclusive and inspiring, are what help us to focus our thoughts, energy and conversation. It's easy for us to want to be everything to everyone, but we made the decision early on in the day that "if it doesn't fit our Vision, it can't be a priority".

2. An acknowledgement of our individual and collective successes and failures was a great way for us to stay in touch with each other and the day-to-day issues of a career in health and medical research. If we in FWPAG have felt a recent high or low, our FW members probably have too, and remembering these will help us keep on track with achieving our Vision.

3. Reminding ourselves of all the things we do was important. We rarely put it all down in one place, but the activities of FW are diverse, including events, Carer's Travel Scholarships, our sector-first cross-institutional Mentoring Program, our Academic Partnership program, our website, monthly newsletter and regular social media posts. Phew, no wonder we're exhausted! But that's pretty impressive right!?

4. It's critical for us here at FW to remain on the pulse, delivering events and initiatives that are innovative, valuable and needs-based. We never want to waste precious resources duplicating what may already be out there! So half our planning day was dedicated to a situational analysis and horizon scan, including other government, university and medical research institute programs, available grants and scholarships, and the progress of national and international Male Champions of Change and Athena Swan programs.

5. After digesting what we currently do and what else is out there, it was time for us to set our priorities for what's next for FW. As our whole field moves towards [impact-based measurement and assessment](#), we decided a top priority for us for the coming months should be **determining the impact of Franklin Women**. We hear it anecdotally at our events and through informal feedback on our Mentoring Program, but have not yet dedicated the resources to formally collecting or documenting our impact. Franklin Women is now at a critical point of growth and we will be actively seeking funding to continue our

work. Therefore, in order to be successful in our applications, measuring our impact beyond membership and participation metrics is important for us now more than ever. So, with that in mind...

We would like to call on you, our members and subscribers, to tell us your stories. How has Franklin Women impacted you and/or your career? If you have a story that you would like to share with us, no matter how big or small, please contact us on [amy@franklinwomen.com.au](mailto:amy@franklinwomen.com.au) or reach out to us on Twitter to arrange a one-on-one interview. As a gesture of thanks, all those who share their stories with us will go into the draw to win a 1-year Franklin Women membership or renewal, to be drawn at the end of 2018 – Oh Yeah!

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## Learning to manage your energy

*It is just as important to assign time for priority-setting in your personal life as it is in the workplace. However, if you are like us, your personal priorities always take a back seat when life gets a bit hectic. Here FW member Ornella writes about the importance of managing your personal energy for an impactful career and happy life.*



I'm sitting in the doctor's office for the third time in as many weeks. "You have young children," the doctor says, "it's that time of the year...". He's talking about my cough that I cannot shake. I've been coughing for what feels like months now. He suggests a blood test and rest. I do the blood test and forget the rest.

Looking back now, I realise that I was permanently stressed and exhausted. My energy stores were depleted. I was worn out. At the time, I had two beautiful little children who believed that sleeping was optional, I felt stuck and uninspired in my job and overloaded with personal commitments. I

stubbornly persisted and didn't take time out for myself, because I didn't want to let anyone down or look like I wasn't coping.

That was 4 years ago, and it took a diagnosis of pneumonia for me to stop and realise that something needed to change.

We all know that a good diet, exercise and sleep are crucial to helping keep our energy levels up and staying well. However, for me, looking after myself was also about the importance of self-care and taking time to nurture my emotional and mental wellbeing. So, I asked myself, "How could I live my life with purpose and focus on what is meaningful?" As I started to answer this question, I discovered that what was important to me was also what energised me. Like doing work that is challenging and matters, both paid and unpaid;

spending time with people I care for and who care for me; doing things that spark joy; and taking time out when I need to.

I have learnt the importance of being intentional about how I spend my time. This has helped me make decisions and prioritise commitments and new opportunities, as well as work out when I need to stop doing something or say no. I'm now a more present parent, an engaged colleague and a happier partner.

I've also set up some non-negotiables. These are small actions or activities that help me stay energised especially when life gets demanding. I've shared these with my family and colleagues, so they can support me and keep me accountable.

Here are some of my non-negotiables:

- Starting my day by 'swallowing a frog': Each morning I identify the most important challenge (or dreaded task) for the day and make that a priority before getting distracted with emails, social media or other people's priorities.
- My 9pm cut-off: Tidying up, laundry, personal admin...if it's not done by 9pm, I'll tackle it again the next day.
- Yoga: It grounds me. A whole hour to myself, plus I get to lie down at the end.

So, what will your non-negotiables be?

***Ornella Care*** is a Senior Health Solutions Specialist at Bupa A&NZ where she helps people live longer, healthier, happier lives. She is a mum to three amazing little girls, and happiest with a coffee in one hand and a book in the other.

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## We are loving right now...

***Priority setting!*** This month we've been inspired by professional and personal priority setting. It's not easy to dedicate the time for this, but we can promise you that it is well and truly worth it! So here are some of our favourite tips and tricks for priority setting:

- Try out these 13 simple steps to set [\*your priorities straight\*](#)
  - Here is a guide from Forbes on [\*evaluating your priorities\*](#)
  - Try out some [\*time management apps\*](#) (we at FW use Trello to help keep us on track)
  - Some [\*back to basics tips\*](#) on priority setting
  - If a book is more your thing, try [\*Harvard Business Reviews' 10 Must Reads\*](#) on managing yourself
  - Finally, don't forget the importance of [\*managing your daily intake of cute\*](#)
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We want to include your contributions in our newsletter. If you are doing something, or know about something, that you think other women in our field would be interested in, drop us a [\*line\*](#). We are all about sharing, promoting and collaborating between women in our field. Don't be shy, it might bring about a great opportunity! Want to receive our newsletters directly to your inbox? [\*Subscribe here\*](#).