



ABNA EXCHANGE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALASIAN BIOSPECIMEN NETWORK ASSOCIATION

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LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE

Well, let's get ready to respectfully back either Team Biospecimens or Team Data at the ABNA Debate – which really does not run off the tongue as easily!

Both teams are squared away and working on their strategies. ABNA management is not privy to these conversations so we will be just as surprised as you.

Delegates will be picking the winning team, so make sure you have downloaded the Currinda V2 App and that you have your login details. While you are in there, don't forget to update your bio and upload a profile picture – if you are having issues please get in touch.

It's Almost Time!

Hello ABNA! It's almost time to come together again, just 28 days to go (but who's counting)! This will be ABNA's 22nd annual conference, and we're excited to welcome you back to be part of it. This edition of Exchange is packed with highlights and teasers, so read on to stay in the know. Haven't registered yet? There's still time!



What's in store this year? As always, an outstanding line-up of presenters across human and non-human biobanking and biospecimen science, plus Special Interest Groups, workshops, and of course, the Great Debate – this one's set to be a cracker! With the launch of ABNA's new Asia Pacific Travel Grant we introduce the three successful applicants in this edition so read on to meet them ahead of the conference. You'll hear from last year's Emerging Leaders scholarship winners and don't forget at the conference we will be announcing the recipient of the Achievement in Australasian Biobanking Award. It's going to be action-packed! Take a minute to look at the program for more details.

As my two-year term as President comes to an end, I want to thank you all for your support and contributions. ABNA's growth and achievements are only possible because of you, and I look forward to sharing more at the AGM. It's been an honour leading the association, and I'm excited to see ABNA thrive under new leadership.

Finally, a big thank you to Anusha Hettiaratchi, our wonderful editor, whose dedication has made this newsletter such a valuable and enjoyable resource. As she steps down from her role, we extend our gratitude for the energy and creativity she's poured into every edition.

So, sit back and enjoy this edition of ABNA Exchange!

Georget

2025 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
ABNA DEBATE

Biospecimens with Associated Data
 vs
 Data with Associated Biospecimens

THURSDAY
OCTOBER 23 2025

NEWCASTLE CITY HALL
 2:10PM - 3:00PM

HOSTED BY
 australasian biospecimen network association

TEAM BIOSPECIMENS
 LEAD - DEB GARCIA
 CATHERINE KENNEDY
 CAROLYN HOGG

TEAM DATA
 LEAD - GREG GROSSMAN
 ALEX CALLEN
 RODRIGO HAMEDE

FREE ADMISSION !!
 (WITH CONFERENCE REGISTRATION)

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
[BIT.LY/ABNA2025NEWCASTLE](https://bit.ly/ABNA2025NEWCASTLE)

5 Minutes with a Biobanker

We approach a different professional in the biobanking arena with the same five questions each month.



This month we feature Cassandra Griffin, Biobanking and Clinical Research Manager / Co-Deputy Director HMRI Cancer Detection and Therapy Program at [NSW Regional Biospecimen Services](#).

Cass is an ABNA Past President and co-chairs ABNAs Indigenous Engagement in Culturally Safe Biobanking and Post-Mortem Special Interest Group, she is also an active member of ISBER, co-chaired their 2024 Annual Meeting in Melbourne and has recently submitted her PhD.

THE QUICK QUESTIONS

Are you left or right handed?

Right

Would you rather play it safe or risk it all?

Play it safe – It really depends on the situation though! When I'm travelling, I'm definitely a risk it all person but in day to day life I'm somewhat boring!

Should pineapple go on pizza?

Yes – It's the secret ingredient that makes pizza great!

Do you prefer to type or hand-write meeting notes?

Type – I have the handwriting of an intoxicated flamingo (note they don't have hands!!) Nothing is legible!

Dark vs milk chocolate, which one would you chose?

Dark chocolate, the darker the better – Aldi Choceur dark chocolate – it's like milk chocolate and dark chocolate had a deliciously dark yet oh so creamy child!

What was your first job in biobanking?

My current role is my first job as a 'card carrying biobanker' but the more I engaged with biobanks I realised that nearly every job I've held has in some shape or form involved biobanking. My first job after graduation was in a PC3 laboratory working with bacterial (specifically rickettsial) isolates developing vaccine targets. Part of that role included maintenance of our rickettsial collection (spoiler alert – it was a subset of the national reference collection and essentially a biorepository). For anyone who knows me, the thought of me, alone, in a PC3 lab... isolated from all other people with nobody to talk to ... let's just say I wasn't cut out for the solitude of a PC3 lab! I stayed in the same team but transitioned to a Hospital Scientist position, profiling nosocomial outbreaks and MRSA infections in pediatric ICU and once again took on the management of a collection of isolates. Some of the isolates dated back to the 1950s and it was an incredible collection that needed someone to go through them, catalogue, annotate and re-store.

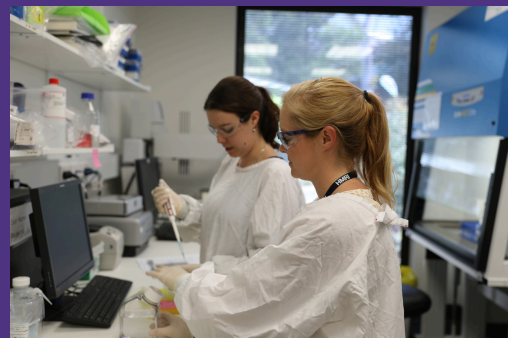
How long has your biobank been operating and what is your 'elevator pitch' for your biobank/job?

Our biobank pre-dates my time here considerably. We started collecting FFPE in 2012 and then expanded to sequential bloods in 2014. I arrived fresh off the plane from London in 2018 and was told I had 5 years of incremental funding until we needed to be self-supported. Somehow, we got there! Our team manages internal collections, multi-center clinical trial collections and a post-mortem brain biobank funded by the Mark Hughes Foundation. Our services range from tissue procurement and distribution to trial kit preparation, logistics, sample processing, cataloging and review of large scale frozen collections as well as a range of research support services including TMA development, automated Immunohistochemistry and DNA & RNA extraction.

What is the craziest thing you have done to save a sample/s?

A lot of my biobanking happens at odd hours of the morning due to our post-mortem program ... but those are stories for another time.

We received a shipment of several 100s aliquots that had been dumped into a bag. The site had dropped the ball big time by not following the instructions on the manifest, so they either had to be discarded or manually identified. A colleague and I (Hi Jen!) had to lay out 50 forms at a time and then scatter the aliquots in batches on dry ice. Nothing was in numerical order - we just had to pick a tube and play sample bingo till we found the right form. It was ... character building and I think we trauma bonded!



Other than that, my colleague Rose Upton took me out on a sample collection adventure once! The two of us, her a fabulous academic, an old Uni ute, dark roads into the national park, pot holes everywhere, freezing temps and gum boots that totally didn't fit. We had to play frog noises on our phones to call our friends (I did try calling personally but apparently I'm not that convincing as a LittleJohn's Tree Frog) then follow the noise and catch them. I got very excited when one answered my call and I proceeded to dive into the pond near him. I named him Steve (apparently not standard practice), we bonded, collected our samples and I'm sure he's still out there processing his strange experience being abducted. You'll never be forgotten Steve.

What has been your favourite moment (so far) in your biobanking career?

The people, friends and connections, are the best thing to come from biobanking ... but there are 3 moments!

From an ABNA standpoint, feel I was incredibly privileged to be president during my particular term. Opening our first in-person conference post-pandemic in Perth felt like a really special milestone. As nervous and overloaded as I felt, I remember taking a minute to really process that it was, well... a moment! I was so grateful to everyone who pitched in to get us there and made it possible. It reminded me how special our community is and how lucky we were that the science we support had given us a solution to the pandemic.

The second is the 2023 Gold Coast Conference. Sea World was tossed around as a joke, but so too was the music theme! I still can't believe the committee went for it #enablers!! That conference was an absolute labour of love and seeing everyone's face when we walked through those doors to the red carpet, arriving at Dolphin Beach prior to dinner, speed networking with a freaking shark ... every moment was incredible and what a privilege to share them with colleagues and friends!!

The last one was an emotional moment that changed me professionally and personally, so much so that we published it. I received a call about a girl in her early 30s who was in the hospice and wanted to donate her brain, but sadly she was no longer conscious and (I was told) had 0 chance of her regaining lucidity. We applied for a waiver that would permit enduring guardian consent and it was approved the next day. When I got there, her family were inconsolable and my heart sank because I thought I was too late. I wasn't. She was awake, talking and interacting with us. Her movements and speech were both laboured but she managed to write a legible signature and look me in the eye - saying that she wanted to donate so that one day people wouldn't go through this. She passed away not long after signing and I can still see her dad settling her back down in the bed as late afternoon sun poured in from the window. It was haunting and inexplicable but showed me how much it can mean to patients to be able to donate and directly impact research. Biobanking gives hope where medicine can't yet and it is an absolute honour to play a small part in facilitating that.

Newcastle Conference



This is our last Newcastle Conference Corner as the conference dates approach rapidly. The Conference Organising Committee is busy with the last of the behind-the-scenes tasks – organising poster judges, reviewing abstracts, updating the conference app, assigning sponsor tables and putting finishing touches on gala dinner decorations. All of which means our delegates should have a seamless conference experience.

On this month's conference blog we check in with Novocastrian biobankers favourites spots for coffee, drinks, food, to tourist and what they feel is a quintessentially Newcastle experience.

Read the September blog on our conference website

[CLICK HERE](#)

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



GREGORY
GROSSMAN



DEBRA LEIOLANI
GARCIA

INVITED SPEAKERS



HEATH
BADGER



ALEX
CALLEN



MARTINA
CHIAREZZA



MARK
CURRAN



NATHALIE
DOUCET



MATT
DUNN



ASHLEE
DUNN



RODIGO
HAMEDE



CAROLYN
HOGG



HUBERT
HONDERMARK



SURANGA
KATSURI



NIKITAS
KOUSSIS



BEN
MATTHEWS



TOBY
MILLS



ALISHA
MOORE



TRISH
RADOTIC



COLIN
SOBEK



KAREN
SOMMERVILLE



BENTE TALSETH-
PALMER



MAEGHAN
TOEWS



MAIKEN
UELAND



ROSE
WADWELL



RHYS
WILLIAMS



2025 Asia-Pacific Travel Grant Awardees

Meet the three recipients of ABNA's inaugural Asia-Pacific Travel Grant.

Next month, they'll be attending their very first ABNA Annual Conference in Newcastle – we're thrilled to welcome them.

JAVERIA AIJAZ



Dr Aijaz is the head of a rapidly developing biorepository unit, her work encompasses both the technical and administrative aspects of biobanking at Indus Hospital and Health Network in Karachi, Pakistan. This is Pakistan's first paediatric acute leukaemia biobank and unique infectious disease specimen collections. Currently she is overseeing the transition from a clinical laboratory-based repository to a dedicated expanded facility. Dr Aijaz leads critical decisions regarding specialised equipment including liquid nitrogen storage, automated dispensing systems, and safety infrastructure.

They are also developing a custom information management system to address their unique needs while preparing for BAP accreditation by 2027 – pioneering biorepository accreditation in Pakistan.

"Attending the ABNA conference will provide targeted professional development, especially in areas where I currently lack formal training. Direct interaction with international experts will enable me to benchmark our practices against global standards and identify opportunities for improvement. As just one example, I need practical guidance on best practices, particularly regarding optimal consent timing, pathologist involvement protocols, and regulatory compliance strategies within our pathology laboratory setting."

Abstract title: Biospecimen Utilization Patterns and Optimization Strategies at IHHN, Karachi



JAJAH FACHIROH

Jajah is a lecturer in Department of Histology and Cell Biology at FK-KMK UGM, and WHO-SEARO GCLP facilitator. Her research is focusing on Nasopharyngeal carcinoma and EBV, molecular epidemiology of cancer, and biobank. She is also ISBERs IPR Regional Ambassador for Indonesia. Jajah lead UGM Biobank team to initiate and supporting its official launch in 2018. She contributed to establishing the Biobank for Health Research Network in 2015, focusing on education and advocacy to support biobank development, with UGM Biobank playing a key role.

From 2022 to 2024, she served as a technical advisor for the Ministry of Health Indonesia's BGSi Biobank and together with UGM team, is currently assisting biobank development at various institutions in Indonesia.

"From the ABNA conference I hope to establish contact with nearby biobankers, learn about the application of operational standard in biobanking, as well as learning more around the ethical, legal and social implications of minority, paediatric and cohort biobanks."

Abstract title: UGM Biobank Role in Development of Biobank in Indonesia



TEBUKA TOATU

Tebuka is the Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network and Laboratory Surveillance Coordinator. The Pacific Community is the primary scientific, technical, and development organization for the Pacific region and provides support to its 27 member countries and territories in areas like climate change, disaster management, health, gender equality, and sustainable development.

"Attendance of the ABNA conference through this grant and acquiring knowledge and developing network with other scientists present during this conference would certainly assist me in the effective dissemination of knowledge on biobanking to the Pacific."

Abstract title: An innovative approach to enhancing the capability of the SPC antibiogram in strengthening multi-resistant organisms testing, identification and confirmation in six selected Pacific Island Countries.

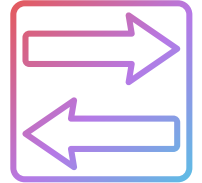
Careers in Focus

by Jennifer Byrne

Director of Biobanking-NSW Health, Professor of Molecular Oncology, University of Sydney

Welcome to the 4th edition of “Careers in Focus”, where we talk about how we can promote and develop careers in biobanking and for biobankers. So far, we’ve talked about CV’s, setting up job alerts, ways to think about your career direction and job descriptions. This month, we’re going to dive into the fascinating world of position regrading.

Last month, I asked you to dig out your job description, to check whether it’s up to date. In doing so, you might have found that your role has experienced some “position creep”. Position creep can happen in biobanking, for example, when team members leave and aren’t replaced, leading to everyone doing a few extra tasks. This can be a good thing, as long as position titles and salaries keep pace.

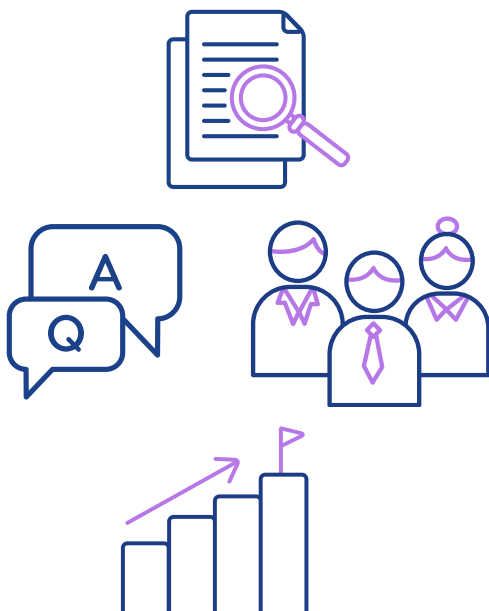


If your job description seems inaccurate, in most institutions, it’s possible to apply to be regraded. This involves proving to a grading committee that you’re now doing a job that’s fundamentally different from the role described in your job description. Just to add some complexity, regrades can be positional or personal. A positional regrade changes the position title going forward, regardless of who holds the role. In contrast, a personal regrade is awarded to someone as an individual. If the person were to leave the role, the title would revert to the previous job title.

In some institutions, there may not be much difference between a positional and a personal regrade. However, some organisations might require positionally regraded positions to be readvertised. It’s worth obtaining advice from your HR department or grading committee about this possibility.

Regardless of whether you apply for a positional or personal regrade, regrading applications require your manager’s support. Regrading generally results in salary increases, and so your manager, and possibly others, will need to confirm that funds are available to pay the higher salary.

Most regrading applications involve providing a copy of your current job description and your proposed new job description, with the differences in the new job description clearly highlighted. Regrading committees usually also request a copy of your CV- hence the value of keeping your CV up to date.



When proposing a new job description, applicants can work with their manager and HR department. It’s safe to start by adding in the tasks that you’re already doing. That said, the new job description will need to align with the expectations of the regraded role. It’s therefore a good idea to request sample job descriptions for roles that are 1-2 levels above your current role, to make sure that the new job description addresses all requirements. Your manager might also suggest adding further tasks and responsibilities. Sometimes this might be necessary for a successful application. Nonetheless, it’s important for job descriptions to not be unreasonably inflated- particularly as “position creep” is likely to restart after regrading.

There are a few traps to avoid with regrading applications. You might feel that you deserve a much higher salary than you're receiving now. However, most grading committees can only award limited salary increases. Most positions are usually regraded to the next position level, for a similar reason. It's also very important to follow application instructions to the letter. Some grading committees don't meet often, and if your application is rejected as incomplete, you could be waiting months for another chance to apply.

Finally, if your application isn't successful, all is not lost. You'll have an updated CV, and a job description that better aligns with your talents and capabilities. This will put you in a great position to find another role- either where you're working, or somewhere else.

I hope to see many of you at ABNA 2025 conference in Newcastle for our careers workshop featuring one of our international invited speakers, Debra Leiolani Garcia.

WORKSHOP

Emerging Leaders and Biobanking Professional Development

Biobanking Evolving Through Time

Professor Jennifer Byrne

22 - 24 October 2025

Newcastle



 #ABNA2025Newcastle

 bit.ly/ABNA2025Newcastle





Debra Leiolani Garcia

ANRRC2025 and CAS-ANSO International Conference on Microbial Power



Bangkok, Thailand

ANRRC2025

CAS-ANSO International Conference on Microbial Power

TOPIC

Advancing Bioenergy and Biomanufacturing in the Belt and Road Initiative

DATE

October 9th(Thu) - 10th(Fri)

Fee

Free Registration

PLACE

Mercure Sukhumvit 24, Bangkok, Thailand

Emerging Leaders Group Chat

As the year comes to an end our 2024 recipients are reflecting on the last 12 months as ABNA's Emerging Leader Scholarship.

ABNA's Emerging Leaders Scholarship was established in recognition of the need to invest in the biobanking community and support the development of future leaders. This initiative aims to strengthen succession planning and foster growth within our sector. The scholarship offers early career biobankers, and those working in emerging biobanking disciplines, the opportunity to attend ABNA meetings and nominate for committee roles after their first year of membership. It enhances ABNA's capacity to engage and empower the next generation of biobankers.

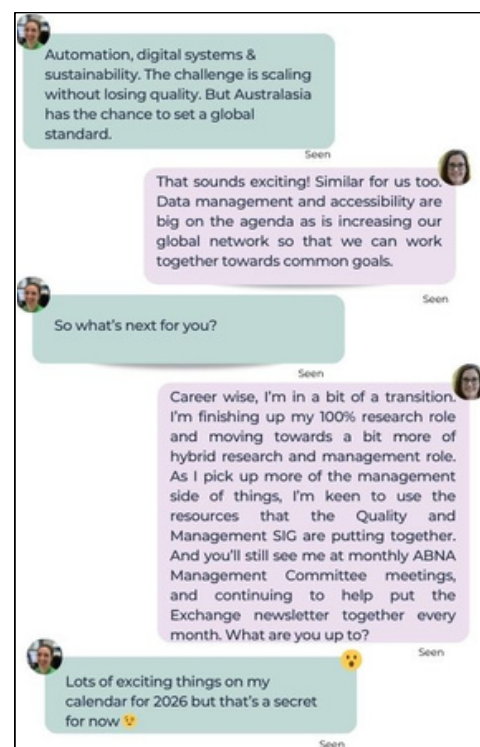
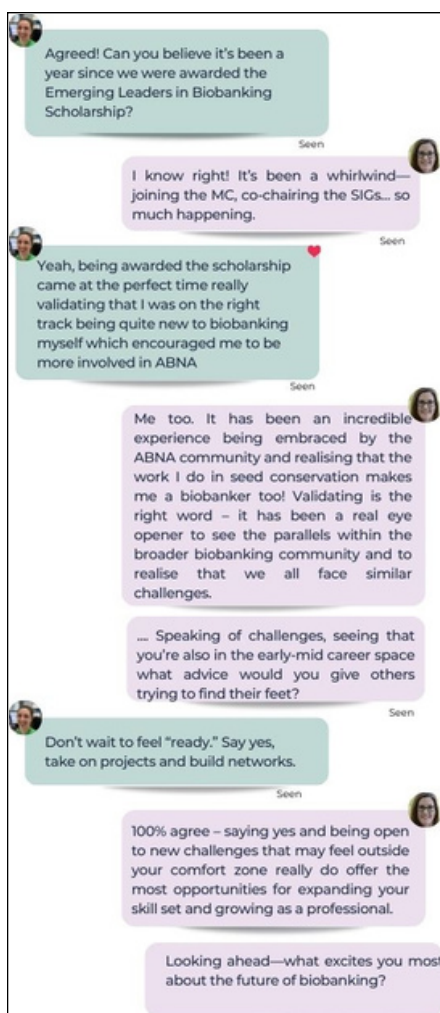
We're proud to highlight the achievements of our 2024 scholarship recipients:

Beth Caruana, Senior Research Scientist at the NSW Statewide Biobank, and

Emma Dalziell, Research Fellow in Seed Science at Kings Park Science and the University of Western Australia.

Both Beth and Emma have had an incredibly full year – not only excelling in their professional roles but also actively contributing to ABNA initiatives and engaging in a variety of external projects.

As we get ready to welcome two new scholarship recipients, we're taking a moment to reflect on the journeys of our current awardees. Below, Beth and Emma share highlights from their year – in their own words.



Biobanking in the News

Recording Australian Islands' freshwater species: highest numbers found on K'gari (Fraser Island)

The University of Queensland Biodiversity Research Group has recently consolidated evidence, confirming a wide variety of freshwater species on Australia's many islands; this includes 102 frog species, almost half of the total number known in Australia. Islands are of particular interest as potential "extinction hubs", where the last members of critically endangered species may be found. The greatest number of freshwater species were found to be on K'gari, the world's largest sand island and a huge tourist attraction. Increasing visitor numbers threaten the habitat of vulnerable species on K'gari and elsewhere, but ironically it is citizen science data that is boosting the understanding of the biodiversity of this World Heritage site.

The full story can be found on the [ABC News website](#)



Perons tree frog, living in K'gari

Photo credit: Samuel Ho

Celebrating a win for the endangered Littlejohn's tree frog

ABNA member and 2023 Emerging Leader Scholarship recipient, Dr Rose Upton featured in a positive news story on the ABC this week. The Littlejohn's tree frog, which exists in the wild at only 3 small locations within NSW, has been bred in captivity for the first time, by the Centre for Conservation Science at the University of Newcastle; the centre's assistant director, Alex Callen will be speaking at the upcoming ABNA meeting in October.

Full details of the conservation efforts can be found on the [ABC News website](#).



Littlejohn's tree frog

Photo credit: University of Newcastle

Should all human remains be removed from museum displays? Focus on the British Museum

A recent opinion piece in the Guardian revisits the topic of the justification for displaying human remains in museums. The article focuses on the British Museum, one of the world's most famous, but also reflects on the Australian landscape, specifically Aboriginal remains at the South Australian Museum. Advances in museological ethics and a broad evolution of awareness are driving change in this area – even prompting an all parliamentary group in the UK to propose the [removal of all human remains from public display](#), and yet many global institutions continue to retain human specimens within their collections. The opinion piece can be read in full can on the [Guardian Australia](#) website.



Egyptian mummies at the British Museum

Photo credit: Prisma by Dukas Presseagentur GmbH/Alamy in the Guardian

If you have any suggestions for a short article for ABNA Exchange, please contact: info@abna.org.au

Content deadline for October edition 24.10.25



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