# BIO-BABBLE

AUSTRALASIAN BIOSPECIMEN NETWORK ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER 2020



## Update on the ABNA website launch

The ABNA committee is delighted to be unveiling Phase 1 of the new ABNA website, developed in partnership with ABN-Onc. The launch of our new online home will be the culmination of a long-standing partnership that lies at the heart of ABNA's history.

Members will receive an email notification once the new site goes live.

We would love to hear your thoughts on the new webpage. A useful and relevant online hub is dependant on the community who engage with it, so if there are resources that you'd like us to include, events you'd like advertised or with anything else that you'd like us to consider – please get in touch with a member of the ABNA committee.

**A brief recap**

ABNA was officially incorporated as an association in Victoria in July 2009 to provide an enduring association of biobanking professionals following several years of networking and growth. Prior to this, in 2005, a group of 7 biobanking professionals involved in the oncology field were successfully awarded an NHMRC Enabling Grant, and the Australasian Biospecimen Network-Oncology (ABN-Onc) project began. ABN-Onc created a virtual biobank of cancer tissue available for research with the aims of increasing the availability of, and promoting access to, high quality, ethically collected biospecimens for cancer research. As part of this remit, ABN-Onc developed the Tissue Specimen Locator (TSL) to provide a 'high level' searchable interface to help connect researchers with the biobanks holding samples.

ABN-Onc and ABNA shared a common focus: To support and promote best practice biobanking in Australasia. When the ABN-Onc project funding ceased, it made perfect sense to combine the information from both websites into this new, improved ABNA resource.

**What does the new website have to offer?**

The new website is designed to be an online resource for biobankers from all disciplines as well as for researchers wishing to learn more about engaging with biobanks. The site includes resources and links to SOPs, guidelines and training opportunities as well as a member's area with resources from previous and upcoming conferences.

Contact details for member biobanks will be available on the website to foster an online community and to support biobanks in connecting with researchers to provide samples or biobanking services.

**When will the TSL be active?**

Phase 2 of the website launch will include the new TSL. Prior to this we will endeavour to engage with all of our member biobanks with the aim of collating sample collection lists for inclusion. We hope to have more news regarding the timelines for this project in the coming months.

If you have any suggestions for a short article for Bio-Babble, please contact : abna.biobabble@gmail.com

Content deadline for October 2020 edition: 23.10.20

# Asbestos Diseases Research Institute Biobank

Mrs Vesna Aleksova, Biobank Officer

Australia was among the highest consumers of asbestos-containing materials globally due to mining and the importation of asbestos which was used in the construction and transport industries because of its durability and fire-retardant properties. Australia banned asbestos in December 2003 however large amounts still remain in older structures and products, potentially exposing workers, and/or the public to asbestos. Due to this ubiquitous use of asbestos Australia has one of the highest incidences of malignant mesothelioma per capita in the world, with more than 700 new cases diagnosed each year.


Mesothelioma is difficult to diagnose and the median survival after diagnosis is 9-12 months. Currently there is no cure and treatment is palliative in nature. As a response to the asbestos legacy, the Asbestos Diseases Research Institute (ADRI) was opened in 2009. ADRI is a state-of-the-art research institute located on the Concord Hospital campus in Sydney which aims to improve the diagnosis and treatment of asbestos-related diseases and at the same time contribute to more effective measures to prevent exposure to asbestos.

To save lives from asbestos-related diseases ADRI has invested in a sustained and concerted effort into three priority areas: 1) laboratory research; 2) clinical sciences; and 3) prevention and public health.

Working with medical specialists and health services, ADRI's dedicated research teams have built a formidable record for developing a best-practice diagnostic framework for earlier detection; improved understanding of the disease mechanism of mesothelioma; ground-breaking treatments to prolong life; and invested in awareness-raising and prevention of exposure to asbestos fibres.

As part of this effort, ADRI established the Biobank in 2010 with the aim of building a national biobank for the collection of high quality well-characterised series of fresh-frozen tissue and blood samples for research into asbestos-related diseases. The collection of samples remains reliant on a consortium of supportive clinicians and their patients undergoing surgical procedures. The apparent fall in cases in 2019 is likely due to delays in the Australian Mesothelioma Registry receiving notifications - the number of cases for 2019 is expected to rise in 2020 and subsequent years. In the past year ADRI has increased the collection of samples from mesothelioma patients with ethical approval to collect from six Sydney hospitals: Strathfield Private, Royal Prince Alfred, Concord Repatriation General, Westmead and Blacktown Hospitals and Sydney Adventist Hospital, with collection at Chris O'Brien Lifehouse expected to commence soon. Annotated with associated clinical data from variety of sources ADRI now has the largest unique collection of biospecimens available for mesothelioma research.

www.adri.org.au Vesna.aleksova@adri.org.au

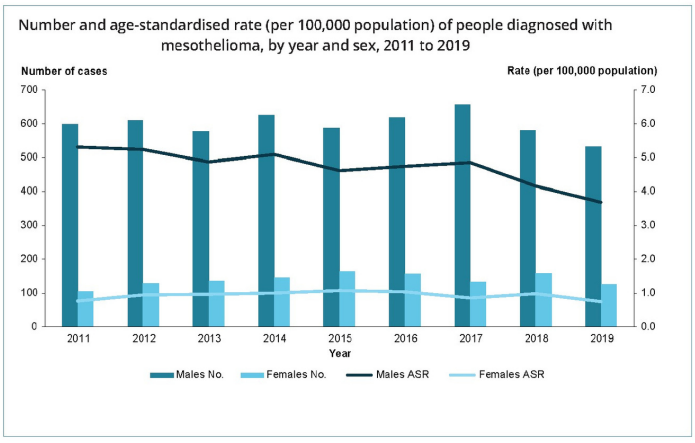


Figure 1: The number of people diagnosed with mesothelioma, 2011 - 2019.

Note: Rates have been age-standardised to the 2001 Australian Standard Population.
Source: AIHW analysis of AMR data at 1 April 2020; Table A2 in Mesothelioma in Australia 2019—data tables.

ADRI
Asbestos Diseases Research Institute

## ISBER and BBMRI-ERIC Biobank Collaboration

Dan Catchpoole, ISBER President 2020-2021

**Does your biobank have biospecimens from patients with COVID-19 or related samples and datasets that can be readily used to assist in research that you would like to make available?**

ISBER and BBMRI-ERIC have partnered to provide a COVID-19-Ready Biobank Registry to connect researchers with biobanks across the globe that are offering samples and datasets available to assist with COVID-19-related research.

As we all have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic around the world, it is vital that we seek opportunities to provide solutions through research built on robust tissue collection practices. Biobanks have much to offer our biomedical research community, and many of ISBER members are actively involved in facilitating COVID-19 research through their biobank. It is crucial that the availability of these biospecimens be made known to the wider research community.

Thus, ISBER has joined with its European partner BBMRI-ERIC to list all COVID-19-ready member biobanks in one location, the BBMRI-ERIC Directory with its new COVID-19 filters. By uniting forces and promoting them to the ISBER and BBMRI communities, we will attract leading COVID-19 researchers from around the world to make contact with our biobanks so as to see the release of valuable biospecimens into the best research programs that will lead our way out of this pandemic.

The framework is ready and we now would like to invite all ISBER members to consider supporting this worldwide initiative. If your biobank has specimens from patients with Covid-19, ISBER invite you to join the BBMRI-ERIC Directory to make your samples easily accessible to the global research community.

Get started now at: www.bbmri-eric.eu/services/isber-biobank-collaboration

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## Gold Coast Biobank eWorkshop

22 October 2020, 10am to 1pm (AEST)


Each year, the Gold Coast Biobank workshop hopes to keep you at the forefront of biobanking practice. Recent unprecedented pressures experienced around the globe have highlighted the need to forge forward with an emphasis on technology.

Sars-CoV2 has changed how we live and work but more importantly how we conduct business. In biobanking, focus is shifting towards automated technology and closing the circle of quality specimens with data security into the future.

From biobanking in space, to exploring and adopting electronic consents to provide donors with greater access to their consents, what legal implications are there?

Does Bitcoin Blockchain have a role in biobanking, when Sars-CoV2 downgraded most economies around the world? All to be discussed at the Open Forum at the end of the workshop.

Register for this eWorkshop at: www.griffith.edu.au/gcbiobank