

VICS Newsletter

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VICTORIAN INFANT
COLLABORATIVE STUDY

VICS



MARCH 2021

Greetings to all of our Victorian Infant Collaborative Study Families Welcome to the 2020/2021 edition of our newsletter

2020 at a glance

A big hello to all members of our VICS Cohorts. 2020 was indeed a challenging year for all of us. Although COVID-19 has affected us all in many and varying ways, our team hopes you are all doing well.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions we have been unable to physically see any of our cohorts since March 2020. However, we expect that situation to change now that restrictions have eased. 2020 was a year for the team to direct their energy to writing research papers, taking VICS research to the wider community.

Four eras of VICS

Our VICS leader, Professor Jeanie Cheong, has published a world-leading study looking at four VICS cohorts: 1991/92, 1997, 2005 and 2016/17. More than 1,000 babies born extremely premature throughout Victoria over the past 25 years participated in the research. There was good news: survival of the most immature babies has increased in the VICS 2016/17 cohort compared with cohorts from the early 1990s. Survival increased from 68% in 1991/92 to 87% in 2016/17, showing improvements in care for the tiniest and sickest babies.

The research also found that extremely premature babies in 2016/17 spent three times longer on breathing support compared with the cohorts in the early 1990s. This was mainly due to changes in breathing treatments to include more non-invasive technology such as nasal high-flow.

The article received extensive print and television media coverage, including:

- Herald Sun
- ABC AM National
- 3AW Breakfast
- ABC News
- 7 News
- A Current Affair.



A big thank you to twins Peter and Leigh from the 1991/92 VICS cohort who were interviewed for the story in the Herald Sun.



Professor Jeanie Cheong
interviewed by 7 News

This important research allows us to see how care has changed over time, and to use this information to improve clinical care. The research is already being used to inform guidelines for clinicians caring for extremely premature babies throughout Victoria.

Thank you to all the VICS families who have participated and supported our research over the last few decades.

You can access the article here:

<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/9/5/e030345.full.pdf>

You can also find out more about this research on The Royal Women's Hospital website:
<https://www.thewomens.org.au/news/more-babies-being-given-a-fighting-chance>

Beanies for babies

We were thrilled to receive this beautiful gift for our precious babies. A huge thankyou to the lovely lady for donating such beautiful hand crafted beanies.

"This morning, I found a parcel in my office. This person had been so inspired by the press coverage by ABC of the VICS 2016-17 paper on Sept 11. She knitted 6 beautiful beanies for babies in the unit as her COVID lockdown project."

–Jeanie Cheong



Recent research

Babies born very tiny or very small are surviving into adulthood in increasing numbers. It is therefore important to understand their long term health outcomes. We continue to look at the results from physical and mental health assessments, and report the outcomes to the wider community.

1991/92 cohort

We have published some of our results from this study in international journals as highlighted below.

Blood Pressure

We measured blood pressure at 25 years of age. We showed that young adults born very tiny or very early were at increased risk of high blood pressure compared with those born normal birthweight. It is important for individuals and health professionals to be aware of the risk of high blood pressure so it can be managed appropriately.

Citation: Haikerwal A, Doyle LW, Cheung MM, Wark JD, Opie G, Roberts G, Patton G, Cheong JLY. High Blood Pressure in Young Adult Survivors Born Extremely Preterm or Extremely Low Birthweight in the Post Surfactant Era. Hypertension. 2020 Jan;75(1):211-217

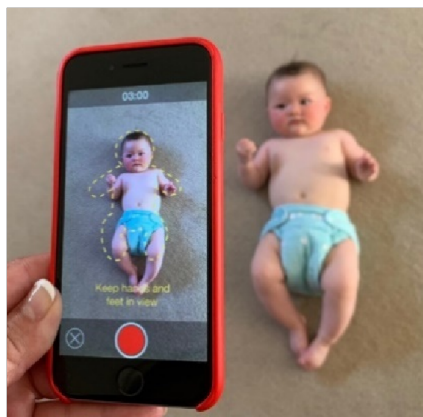
Bone Health

We also examined bone health for the first time. We showed that young adults born very early had lower bone mineral density compared with those born normal birthweight. Healthcare providers and individuals born preterm should be informed about the importance of maintaining robust bone health to reduce the risk of fractures in later life.

Citation: Haikerwal A, Doyle LW, Patton G, Garland SM, Cheung MM, Wark JD, Cheong JLY. Bone health in young adult survivors born extremely preterm or extremely low birthweight in the post surfactant era. Bone.2020 Sept. 17:115648

Baby Moves in the 2016/17 cohort

Ongoing research by Amanda Kwong highlighting our VICS 2016/17 cohort:



Parents from the VICS 2016/17 cohort recorded one of the larger known samples of infant videos for the General Movements Assessment, which looks at infant's movements. Work is now underway to look at how the General Movements Assessment relates to motor and general development at two years of age. We are also examining whether a detailed analysis of infant's movements can provide even more information about their future development. We hope that the results of these studies will help to identify children born preterm who may benefit from early intervention.

Staff Movements

This year two very long-term staff members left our team. Elaine Kelly, an esteemed psychologist with over 40 years of experience, has retired. Elaine saw many, many of our VICS participants at all three centres over many different cohorts. A very big thank you for all your time, dedication and loyalty to VICS. You will be sorely missed. We wish you a happy and fulfilling retirement.

Marie Hayes, VICS nurse coordinator at Monash, who has been with us for many decades, has also retired. Thank you for all your time, loyalty, and dedication to VICS, you are so well-known by our Monash Health participants. We wish you a happy and fulfilling retirement. Marie is being replaced by Emily Johnston.

Welcome to the team Emily

Hi my name is Emily Johnston and I am the new coordinator of the Growth and Development Clinic at Monash Health. I started my neonatal career many years ago in Townsville. A very warm and tropical place to live with the odd cyclone and flood making life interesting. I started with no experience in the SCN and over time worked my way up into NICU, completing a Graduate Certificate in Neonatal Nursing. Part of my role in the unit involved research and I worked on projects to improve the care of infants of diabetic mothers and improve the process for back transfers. I returned to Melbourne to work with NETS, a role that was amazing.

After starting my family, I commenced working in the Monash NICU. While working in NICU, I still wanted to be able to be involved in research and so completed further training. Last year I took the plunge and moved into oncology research. While this area wasn't for me, it has helped give me the skills needed to fulfil my current role in coordinating the clinic. The best thing is being able to tie my interest in research with my enjoyment of neonates and being able to follow-up and see how they are growing and developing. In my spare time I love spending time with my family and catching up with friends and I love to craft especially with beads.

Thank you

Thank you to **all** of our participants and their parents. Your valuable input has enabled us to make important lifesaving advances in research. We hope that as the pandemic situation eases, we may be able to commence some face to face research again soon. In the meantime, please keep in touch, and update us with any changes in contact details.

To update us with your current contact details, including your email address, and to find out more about the Victorian Infant Collaborative Study, visit our website:

<http://www.vics-infantstudy.org.au/>

You can also find us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/vics.infant>



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