Robo doc does the rounds

Robo doc busy on the ward

Robo doc does the rounds

IMPERIAL and St Mary’s NHS Trust are piloting a scheme where medical robots will cover ward rounds.

Remote presence (RP6) robots allow a medical expert to visually examine and communicate with a patient from anywhere in the world via the machine using wireless technology. The robots, which staff have nicknamed Sister Mary and Dr Robbie, can also be used for surgical teaching and even videoconferencing.

The robots are controlled with a joystick from the remote site. The doctor ‘driving’ the robot can view the patient, ask questions, read patient records, and look at X-rays and test results from the console. The patient sees the doctor’s image on the robot’s screen or ‘face’. Although the robot does not physically examine the patient, it allows face-to-face contact between the doctor and patient, providing immediate access to specialists.

Parv Sains, project leader, surgical specialist registrar and research fellow, said benefits include allowing patients direct access to experts worldwide and to the doctor who performed their surgery, even if they cannot be physically at the patient’s bedside.

“If a specialist is at a conference in California but their medical opinion is needed for a St Mary’s patient, or to deliver a lecture to junior doctors, the RP6 robot provides an instant and global link at any time of the day or night.

“Our robots certainly would never replace all doctors on ward rounds, but they are a communication tool which allows a doctor to have direct contact with their patient if they are unable to get to them.

“If we look at a lot of the current strains on the NHS, many senior doctors with skills and knowledge are required to be in several places at once. The robot is a solution in potentially providing their expertise from a remote location and may be a significant step for patient care.”

The robots are being trialled in a general surgery ward and the A&E department at St Mary’s hospital, with training at Imperial’s academic and clinical skills unit. This is the only UK location and one of just a handful of sites in the world: there is one other in Europe and three in the USA.

The RP6 robots are the latest strand in the pioneering integration of robots into healthcare by Professor Sir Ara Darzi, head of Imperial’s division of surgery, anaesthesiology and intensive care and a practising surgeon at St Mary’s.

Professor Sir Ara Darzi said: “This is a revolutionary concept which opens new avenues for telemedicine research and integrates technology with healthcare at a grass roots level, increasing the interface between patients, clinicians and teaching staff.”

As part of the pilot, a study is evaluating how patients respond to the robots, the specific communications skills required for remote presence teleconsultation, and potential applications of the technology in clinical healthcare delivery and training.

Imperial reflects on diversity

THIS week sees Imperial’s first annual diversity lecture, Fear and Loathing in the Mirror: does British society invent the ‘black’ man? Reporter’s Alex Platt went to meet writer, researcher and diversity consultant, Dr Oszie Stuart, who will be giving the lecture.

Issues surrounding disability and race are on the agenda for the lecture as Dr Stuart is keen to point out that there are one and the same experience. He explained: “Several social stereotypes of black men exist, for example, sportsperson, pop star and criminal. As a black man with a disability, I don’t fit into any of these and this makes me invisible. I will discuss in the lecture whether a black man out of his social stereotype can actually exist.”

Christine Yates, the College’s own equality and diversity consultant added: “When doing training or lectures we often separate out the issues, concentrating on just race or age or sexuality. This doesn’t account for us all being a combination of diverse categories. Linking two or more issues encourages the audience to consider the broader issues.”

As a full-time diversity consultant, Dr Stuart is no stranger to the College, having provided both disability and equality training for staff over the past two years. He has also worked with the health and safety team to establish how well Imperial’s estate measures up for disabled people.

He said of his continued involvement with the College: “This organisation, like most, has a way to go to becoming fully inclusive, but I’ve always been very impressed by the positive attitude and keenness to learn shown by Imperial employees. I’ve had the pleasure of meeting many enthusiastic and positive people here, which is the first step to being able to make lasting change.”

So what inspires an inspirational man like Dr Stuart? “I’m inspired by change and those involved in making it take place. Disability awareness is no longer at the bottom of the list and I enjoy, and am proud of, having been part of this change. I get great pleasure from talking to real people about real issues. I would actually describe this as my forte!”

Reporter looks forward to seeing him in action.

The lecture takes place on Wednesday 25 May at 17:00 in Lecture Theatre G16, Sir Al- exander Fleming Building, South Kensington campus. Email c.yates@imperial.ac.uk to attend.

In brief

Imperial professor receives honorary degree

Professor Dame Julia Polak has been granted the honorary degree of doctor of science by the University of Sheffield. The ceremony will take place at the end of July.

Medal for College professor

Professor Nick Ambrosey, senior research investigator in the department of civil and environmental engineering, has been awarded the prestigious Medal of the Seismological Society of America for his achievements and contribution to seismology, earthquake engineering and society.

Professor Ambrosey is the second UK recipient of this distinction, the first being Sir Harold Jeffreys.

New Tanaka appointments

The Tanaka business school has made three major new appointments to its world class finance group to lead the new MSE course in Risk Management. Professors Karim Abdur, financial econometrician, Nitza Touzi, mathematician and finance, and Andreas Karakus, finance, will take up their posts in September.

Key inflammation mechanism found

A team of researchers from Imperial, the Royal Brompton hospital and the University of British Columbia, Canada, has identified a mechanism that increases lung inflammation, making chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD) more severe, and potentially points towards new treatments. They found a correlation between the increase inflammation in the lungs and a loss of activity in an enzyme responsible for switching off inflammatory genes and cells, called histone deacetylase (HDAC). COPD is the only common cause of death in the western world that is increasing, affecting almost a million patients in the UK and four million in the USA.

Imperial awards honorary degrees to business and public health figures

The achievements of two of the world’s leading business and academic leaders were recognised by Imperial at the College’s recent postgraduate awards ceremony. Businessman and philanthropist Hans Rausing and leading epidemiologist and public health expert Haile Debas received honorary science doctorates.

New Chinese appointments for Professor Rees

Professor Lovat Rees, emeritus professor of chemical engineering and honorary fellow of the University of Edinburgh, has been appointed as a specially engaged professor for life at Lanzhou University of Petroleum and Chemical Technology, Fushun, China. He has also been appointed to chair and organise the R. M. Barrer Memorial Symposium at the next International Zeolite Meeting in Beijing in 2007. R M Barrer was head of chemistry at Imperial, 1954–1976.

Lifetime contribution recognised

Emeritus Professor Frits Wentrop, FRS, senior research fellow in the department of chemical engineering and chemical technology, was presented with an Institute of Physics award in recognition of his lifetime contribution to combustion physics at the recent International Flames for the Future meeting held in his honour at Cardiff University in April.
**Bright future for Tanaka**

DAVID Begg, principal of Imperial’s Tanaka business school, has just celebrated two years in post. Alex Platt went to meet him to discuss his vision for the future and what he has achieved so far.

What brought you to Imperial? Being principal of Tanaka business school, while Richard Sykes is rector, was the chance to support life. The Palaeozoic period lasted 280 million years and we have no examples of this sort of water body on Earth today. We have used a new computer model to deduce the behaviour of the sea many times faster than existing modelling systems. The model, developed by Dr Chris Pain, Dr Matthew Piggott and PhD student Martin Wells, has great potential for examining other patterns of ocean behaviour. Martin Wells adds: “The modelling technology developed here at Imperial is a novel and fascinating means of investigating the ancient Earth. Although this is ‘blue-skies’ research now, we are validating an exciting new modelling technology which will ultimately help us to predict climate change.”

So, what was the hardest part about making this come about? We repositioned Tanaka, focusing much more tightly on Imperial strengths, integrating science and business. For example, all of our MBA students carry out a technology venture project, a feasibility study on a piece of Imperial intellectual property—an idea trying to become a spin out company. This leverages Imperial to maximum effect. We also restructured the business school faculty. We created opportunities to bring in top academics and build up areas where we intend to be strong by releasing posts that fitted the Imperial brand less well. Ultimately, we’ve changed what we do, and how we deliver it.

Where do we go next? One exciting thing at the moment is our new MSc Management course, proving hugely popular with over 500 applicants since January, allowing undergraduates with a technical background to go straight into management education before seeking a job. Top employers think this is a powerful combination.

We also want to offer lifelong learning to all Imperial students, for whom graduation should not be the end but merely the beginning of the next phase. Imperial alumni need to belong to a high quality network, and regularly receive valuable updates in the fast moving knowledge economy. Electronic delivery will be part of how we service alumni all over the world and ensure they retain a competitive edge for the rest of their lives.

In research, we are building global excellence in the areas of finance, risk management, healthcare management, innovation and entrepreneurship. We are also aiming to start a centre for intellectual property that will conduct research on how to create, defend and exploit business opportunities.

So what does Imperial need to do to remain in this strong position? Globally, we are competing with universities with billions of dollars of endowment. We can’t take it for granted that British students will go to British universities. American universities offer a different commercial framework. We must keep improving academically, and to finance this we must use all our resources, including our alumni. Imperial gradually worked off again by swimming across the bay.

**Surf not up for Palaeozoic creatures**

Scientists from Imperial have developed a computer model that simulates how tides in north west Europe would have behaved 300 million years ago, and shows a sea with so little movement that it was unlike any on Earth today. Using information on the ancient land masses and the tidal pull of the Moon, the new computer modelling system reveals a picture of a Palaeozoic ocean in which even basic life forms would have struggled to survive. Without tides, shallow coastal water is not mixed up, preventing life-saving oxygen from being circulated. This shortage of oxygen causes lifeforms such as plankton to die and the decay of these life forms uses up further oxygen, contributing to the creation of an environment unable to support life. The Palaeozoic period lasted from 570 to 245 million years ago.

Dr Peter Allison, from the department of earth sciences and engineering and one of the authors of the study, said: “It is very difficult to understand how these huge ancient seas behaved, since we have no examples of this sort of water body on Earth today. “We have used a new computer model to deduce the tidal range in ancient seas and show that they were almost tideless. Understanding the behaviour of these vast shallow expanses is critical to our knowledge of the ancient climate and environments, and to understand how early marine life evolved and diversified,” says Dr Allison. According to the researchers’ estimates, the new computer programme can model the behaviour of the sea many times faster than existing modelling systems. The model, developed by Dr Chris Pain, Dr Matthew Piggott and PhD student Martin Wells, has great potential for examining other patterns of ocean behaviour.

Martin Wells adds: “The modelling technology developed here at Imperial is a novel and fascinating means of investigating the ancient Earth. Although this is ‘blue-skies’ research now, we are validating an exciting new modelling technology which will ultimately help us to predict climate change.”

**Take the fitness challenge at Hammersmith**

THE new Impetus Gym, at the Hammersmith campus, was officially opened this month by campus dean, Professor Gavin Sceaton, and Tim Arnold, head of business services.

The ribbon cutting ceremony was followed by a friendly fitness challenge between Hammersmith campus staff and sport and leisure staff, which involved one member of each team going head to head on the treadmill, cross trainer, bike and rowing machine to complete the 1km target in the fastest possible time. The challenge provided all guests with a light hearted demonstration of the brand new state-of-the-art gym equipment.

The gym, in the basement of the Commonwealth Building, has been an eagerly anticipated development and the reaction from the staff and students there has been extremely positive since it first opened its doors in late February this year.

William Mortimer, campus administrator at Hammersmith, said: “We are delighted to see the opening of the Impetus Gym. We have had the opportunity to meet alumni in many parts of the world, and participated in some key events in recent Imperial history. I’ve cycled a 250km Imperial flag to France for a student sailing regatta and watched student climbers practising on the trees in Hyde Park before they went on an expedition to a previously uncharted area of the Himalayas. I’ve made an alarm call to rowers sleeping it off after a very late night who were due to play a friendly cricket match against alumni, and have indulged in a spot of Greek dancing with a former rector and pro-rector.

Thank you for all of this, and for the chance to work with some of the most talented scientists, engineers and medics in the world. It’s always been stimulating, never boring.”

Liz Curr
Managing editor—Reporter
New donation brings personalised healthcare a step closer

By Abigail Smith

IMPERIAL alumni Dr Winston Wong, founder of Taiwanese electronics group Grace SemiConductor Manufacturing Corporation, has boosted research fusing technology and medicine to improve human health with a donation of £300,000 to Imperial’s institute of biomedical engineering (IBE).

The donation will be used to support the institute’s strategy of integrating existing and next-generation technology to push forward medical diagnosis and treatment.

In particular the funding will be focused on the development of biomedical circuits, a new field which uses microelectronics and nanotechnology to create healthcare devices specifically designed for individual patients.

Professor Chas Tomazou, executive director of the IBE, said: “The human body will become the next key application area of technology. There is an urgent need for real-time data acquisition, processing and communication to healthcare personnel for healthcare to be taken out of the hospital and into the home. For this to be achieved, it is extremely important that experts in different fields are enabled to work together in an integrated way, which is why a dedicated research institute has been established at Imperial. As an engineer, Winston Wong recognises the huge potential of what we are doing at the institute. It is the support of leaders of industry such as him that will ensure this vital research makes it out of the lab and into people’s lives.”

Dr Wong added: “As someone who has a background in electronics, I’ve been very interested in the institute’s work applying core engineering research to medicine. We all hope to continue our independence for as long as possible, and creating better mechanisms for monitoring and personalising healthcare is a major part of this.”

In recognition of the donation, Professor Tomazou’s chair will be renamed the Winston Wong chair in biomedical circuits. Dr Wong holds degrees awarded by Imperial which include a BSc in physics, an MSc in applied optics and a PhD in Medical Ethics and Law: Surviving electrons to have vaginas.”

Dr Wong tells The Independent (12.05.05): “I think there is a unique opportunity to make a real difference. It’s been a real challenge getting all these people in the same place at the same time. We have representatives coming from New Zealand, the USA, Australia, India, South Africa, Sweden, United Kingdom and EURO-CADE. The European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation. Professor Andrew Evans, Dr Arnb Majumdar and myself have spent a long time organising this, so we are excited that it’s finally underway.”

IMPERIAL PhD student Daniel Sokol has scooped a highly commended prize at the Medical Journalists Association annual book awards, for his co-authored book Medical Ethics and Law: Surviving on the Wards and Passing Exams. Daniel is currently completing a PhD on Truth-telling and the Doctor-Patient Relationship with supervisors Professor Raanan Gillon and Dr Tim Rhodes, based at the Charing Cross campus.

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Scientists say film is a load of bleedin’ rubbish

The marriage of quantum physics and new age spirituality in the film What The Bleep Do We Know?! has failed to impress staff and students at Imperial. Following a screening at the College cinema, a dubious Tim Evans tells The Times (17.05.05): “This film is dangerous because it exploits people’s genuine desire to understand the big questions, then gives the answers the veneer of science.”

Describing the film as “horrendously tedi-ous”, João Magalhaes adds in The Guardian (16.05.05): “If you manage to stay awake, you’ll be exposed to such ludicrous extrapolations from microphysics that you may emerge expecting electrons to have vaginas.”

MEDICAL MENTIONS with Abigail Smith

Imperial promotes entrepreneurial loving

Entrepreneurs Keen to tour on their own should seriously consider taking an MBA to hone their skills, according to The Independent’s MBA Guide (12.05.05) which singles out Imperial’s Tamakana business school as a leader of knowledge transfer. Describing Imperial’s tactics as providing a “dating agency for students and technologies”, the head of the entrepreneurship centre, Simon Barnes, comments: “A big part of being an entrepreneur is raising capital and I cannot think of another way of teaching that than through business plan competitions.”

Back to the drawing board for NASA

NASA’s postponement of the Discovery orbiter comes as no surprise to space mission expert Andre Balogh, physics. Blast off has been delayed from May to July at the earliest, reports The Times (30.04.05), due to fears that ice falling from the fuel tank could trigger an accident similar to that of Columbia, which broke up in 2003 killing all seven astronauts.

“The schedule was not realistic even before Columbia,” comments Professor Balogh. “It is always a matter of judgement about what level of risk NASA is willing to accept. The debate about is quite a lovely one.”

The sky’s the limit for air transport workshop

IMPROVING safety in air transport is high on the agenda this week as the centre for transport studies, department of civil and environmental engineering, hosts a workshop on aviation accident/incident precursor analysis.

Imperial has started to compile an archive of reports on incidents that have occurred in at least eight civil aviation authorities from around the world. The workshop will encourage experts in the field to gather and define categories for accident and incidents in air transport and to consider reporting schemes and suitable analysis and data collection methods to learn from these events.

At the workshop organised by Imperial’s Centre for Transport Studies, Dr Washington Ochieng, from the centre’s transport studies, department of civil and environmental engineering, hosts a workshop on aviation accident/incident precursor analysis.

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Put a PhD in your shopping basket

A campaign by Aberdeen University to recruit PhD students with offers of £15,000 a year is welcomed by Imperial’s pro-rector for postgraduate affairs, Mary Ritter. Rebating comparisons with the US system, in which less prestigious institutions use similar tactics to compete with the likes of Harvard, she tells The Independent (12.05.05): “I think there is already a market in PhDs in the UK but it is driven from the top, not like the market in the US. Top institutions here all want the best. We are trying to do this not from weakness but strength.”

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A day in the life

In this new series Reporter aims to shed a bit of light on how others in the College spend their days... If you have any suggestions of people you'd like to see featured, drop us a line at reporter@imperial.ac.uk.

CATHERINE Oriel is PA to the head of the department of chemistry. Professor Richard Templer. After starting as a temp in 1998, Catherine was offered a full-time job within two months and has held her current position for the last two years. Having previously worked in advertising and public relations, her role at Imperial is different but one she really enjoys.

Reporter's Alex Platt went to meet Catherine to ask her about a typical day in her working life.

8.15 Catherine usually gets in early. She said: "I really value the first 45 minutes of my day. It gives me a chance to get prepared for the day without the phone ringing or people knocking at the door. It's sometimes the only time that Richard and I get the chance to talk without being interrupted!" Richard's diary management can be complex and requires Catherine's special attention.

9.00 Catherine's morning is spent in a variety of ways. She explained: "I can be doing anything from preparing papers or briefing notes for meetings, acting as a first point of call for a whole range of internal and external queries or taking minutes from one of the several policy groups I'm involved with. I don't really have a set time for anything, it's impossible, as you never know what's coming next. It's a question of prioritisation". She operates a strictly open door policy: "I feel that I have a service role within the department. I like being accessible and it's important too. Colleagues know they can come and see me anytime and they will have my full attention. And the same is true for colleagues in other departments or faculties; they are busy people and their time is valuable.

12.30 Catherine generally grabs a sandwich and heads back to her desk.

13.00 Catherine was responsible for the launch of the department web pages last year. Part of her role now is to maintain these and ensure they remain up to date and interesting. Catherine's next big project, with a colleague, is to populate the personal web-pages for the 48 academic staff in her department. Catherine said: "I love having a project. I have a huge sense of satisfaction when I have the finished article in front of me."

14.15 Richard Templer is away from the office the day Reporter visits, so Catherine is busier than ever with the phone calls and emails flooding in. She said: "When Richard is away, he needs more than someone to just hold the fort, I need to deal with a whole range of things that may arise. The head of department's office is often the destination for complex problems; it can take hours sometimes to unravel them, see what the real issues are and to supply Richard with enough information for him to make a decision."

15.00 Catherine spends time during the week keeping the plasma screen in the chemistry building entrance up to date. The board is essential for anyone looking for the latest news or information about the department.

16.00 If there's nothing else going on, Catherine heads home on the tube. Now the summer finally seems to be arriving, she spends time in her garden, although admits to checking her work emails at home from time to time. She said: "I am really happy in my job. I am fortunate enough to have really good and strong relationships both with Richard and others in my department. I gain a great deal of job satisfaction and wouldn't change it for the world."

Wye are the champions

WYE Ladies have played their way to victory to become the new University of London rugby champions. The Wye team scored a decisive 17-0 victory against the London School of Economics (LSE) at Imperial's Harlington ground at the beginning of the month.

Readership survey prize draw results

AS promised in edition 151 of Reporter, the winner of our readership survey prize draw has been chosen. Sarah Shemilt from finance and a friend will enjoy a complimentary meal for two at Hugo's restaurant. Sarah's name was pulled out of the hat from one of the many entrants to the draw. Many thanks to all those that took the time to share their views.

EDITOR