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MEDIA RELEASE

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Non-Indigenous renal researcher honoured to be chosen for Montana conference

In a major recognition of her PhD research on Aboriginal people's experiences with renal (kidney) care, especially dialysis, Lismore-based Liz Rix has been invited to present at the October conference of the American Indigenous Research Association in Pablo, Montana USA.

The conference has attracted high-level speakers from various First Nation peoples. While Liz Rix is not an Indigenous person, the extensive work behind her thesis was focused on Aboriginal communities in the NSW Northern Rivers.

Ms Rix believes that the experiences and views of the renal patients in her research group would in all likelihood be common to many Indigenous renal patients across Australia, despite the unique cultural and family obligations, and norms, in each Aboriginal community.

Ms Rix paid tribute to a number of local Aboriginal people who helped her gain the confidence and cooperation of renal patients. They include Patsy Nagus, who has since passed away, Russell Kapeen, and Charles Moran.

Her research also drew on the experiences of a range of health professionals involved in the care of Indigenous patients with renal disease, which Australian Aboriginal people experience at a rate eight times higher than non-Aboriginal Australians.

"No previous studies in rural Australia have explored the experience of Aboriginal patients with haemodialysis or renal services delivery, nor of those providing their care," Ms Rix said.

"Among the findings was that 'Family' is a key motivator for persevering with haemodialysis, a demanding process that lasts up to six hours and must usually be undertaken three times a week if done in-centre."

Crucially, 'institutional', rather than individual, racism was found to be a barrier to effective care for Aboriginal renal patients.

"I found minimal racism at the individual level, with both participant groups demonstrating the motivation and goodwill for improved relationships and better understanding between them," Liz Rix said.

Ms Rix's paper in Montana, "Can a white Aussie woman 'get it'? Using an Indigenist paradigm to inform culturally sensitive mainstream renal services for Aboriginal peoples in rural Australia", focuses on her own role as a non-Indigenous person working as a renal nurse and a researcher in an Indigenous setting.

Chapters of the thesis have been published in international medical journals, and the four main recommendations are included in the Northern NSW Integrated Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Plan, launched recently.

Professor Lesley Barclay said, “Liz Rix’s research is a significant contribution to the body of knowledge about one of the major diseases affecting Aboriginal people, not just on the North Coast but Australia-wide.

“She has done brilliant research in a field that is clinically and culturally complex, and the future beneficiaries will include renal patients and the health professionals who help care for them.”

Details of the conference - <http://americanindigenousresearchassociation.org/meeting/agenda/>



Photo: Liz Rix with the painting ‘The journey of Aboriginal people in regional & rural NSW on Haemodialysis’ by the late Patsy Nagus who assisted with her doctoral research.

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