

NEUROSCIENTIST NAMED YOUNG ALUMNA OF THE YEAR

Feb 19th 2010

Neuroscientist Dr Jessie Jacobsen has been named the University of Auckland Young Alumna of the Year for 2010. While studying for her PhD at the University Dr Jacobsen played a major role in developing a sheep model of Huntington's disease under the supervision of Professors Richard Faull and Russell Snell. The model is of critical importance to researchers at the Centre for Brain Research, who hope it will help them to understand more about the neurodegenerative disease and how to treat it.

Huntington's disease is a degenerative brain disease for which there is currently no cure. All current models use small animals, so developing a large animal model was ground breaking work. The ongoing research may lead to greater understanding of the disease and the development of new therapies.

Dr Jacobsen graduated with a Bachelor of Science from The University of Auckland in 2003. In 2004, after completing a first class honours in Biomedical Science, she was awarded a "Bright Futures" Top Achiever Doctoral Scholarship and commenced her PhD researching Huntington's disease.

Her doctoral research developing the Huntington disease sheep model won her the MacDiarmid Young Scientist of the Year award in 2007 and awards at two international conferences. The work was supported by the Freemasons of New Zealand, who provided the critical funding to get the dream off the ground.

In December 2008 she was awarded the Neurological Foundation of New Zealand Philip Wrightson Postdoctoral Fellowship to study with Professor Marcy MacDonald - part of the team that identified the Huntington's disease gene in 1993 - at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School in the United States.

Dr Jacobsen will receive her Young Alumna of the Year award at the Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner on 5 March. She joins five graduates of the university who have been named 2010 Distinguished Alumni for their outstanding contributions to their professions, their communities and the nation.

On 6 March Dr Jacobsen will take part in the Distinguished Alumni Speaker Day, presenting a lecture titled 'Hope' and 'Dignity': Huntington's disease research. Her lecture, at the Owen G. Glenn Building, 12 Grafton Road, is from 12-1pm

Everyone is welcome at all the Distinguished Alumni lectures which are free. Full information on the day can be found at

www.alumni.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/home/alumni/events

Contact

Pauline Curtis, Communications Adviser
Ph: 09 373 7599 ext 83258 or 021 97 00 89
Email: p.curtis@auckland.ac.nz