

17 April 2020

Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on GI and Liver Researchers in Australia

We are currently finding ourselves in unprecedented, difficult times. Many, if not all, of us have been dealing with often daily changing professional and personal challenges. Different states have implemented different regulations but no matter where you are and whether you work in a research institute, a university or a hospital environment, life has certainly not been 'business as usual'. We have all been inundated with emails encouraging good respiratory hygiene, disinfection practises and social distancing, and often also mandating working-from-home or the cessation of all non-essential work activities. Rarely were these 'non-essential activities' defined and anxiety spread like bushfires only a few weeks ago. As a consequence, many workplaces have observed a partial or complete shutdown, while others commenced preparations but then decided to allow researchers to continue using roster systems or at least social distancing rules.

We will all have to come to terms with the fact that our research activities have been severely impacted and outputs significantly reduced. However, we are all in this together and all we can do is roll with the punches. It has never been more important to support each other and lend a helping hand where needed - in our own teams and collaborations, institutions or societies. Let us be hopeful that we will come out the other end with a strong sense of community and collegiality. The GESA board and various subcommittees will come together in the coming months to support members as much as possible during these COVID-dominated times, where our usual activities have had to cease.

You will have seen in the latest GESA announcements that the GESA Board, the GESA AGW Scientific Program Committee Chair and the CEO have had to make the difficult decision to cancel AGW 2020 in Melbourne. In addition, the respective convenors and program committee also decided to postpone the biennial GESA Research Workshop, which was planned to be held in the Barossa Valley this coming December, due to the foreseeable significant decline in external sponsorship opportunities. This means that, regrettably, we will not be able to network, deliver education, promote research and mentor early career researchers the way we know. However, GESA is currently exploring various options to stay connected and network online until the research world is allowed to go back to normal, while the GESA Research Workshop has been rescheduled to March 2021.

Beginning of the year, the GESA Research and Grants Committee met to discuss funding priorities for 2020. Before COVID-19 hit us, the Committee decided to offer travel grants, amongst other schemes. The purpose of this grant scheme was to support innovation and excellence through visits to leading laboratories and clinics around the world or attendance at a prestigious international conference. This will no longer go ahead for obvious reasons. Instead, the committee will now carefully consider other options to support the research community and especially our early career members in 2020 - we will send updates as soon as they become available.

The GESA Research and Grants Committee is currently reviewing applications that were submitted for the 2020 GESA-Ferring IBD Clinical Excellence Grants, with results to be released end of April.

The [NHMRC](#) has recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic may be affecting the research of current grant holders and in recognition of the need for flexibility in these uncertain times have provided opportunities to vary grants. Furthermore, NHMRC has announced some [changes to the application deadlines](#) for a number of its grant schemes. The [Australian Research Council \(ARC\)](#) has also made provision for researchers affected by the COVID-19 situation. Other funding bodies ([MRFF](#), [AGITG](#), [Cancer Australia](#), etc.) have made adjustments to grant timelines in view of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a final note, GESA recognises the severe impact of COVID-19 on all research activities and will automatically extend the duration of all current GESA grants and their respective final report deadlines by six months.

We hope that all our members are managing to keep safe and sane.

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Chair, GESA Research and Grants Committee

Simone Strasser
President, GESA

Disclaimer:

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