

## Quick Update:

- Save the Dates:
  - 14<sup>th</sup> COGNO Annual Scientific Meeting
  - Ideas Generation Workshop (Virtual)
- Getting to know Ben Kong



# COGNO

COOPERATIVE TRIALS GROUP  
FOR NEURO-ONCOLOGY

# Member Newsletter

Issue 40

Winter 2022

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## Message from our Chair



Dear COGNO Member

I'm sure you will agree that it has been a particularly packed season of activity for all, and especially so for COGNO network members and the core operations and development team. Significant work led by Professor Hui Gan has been invested in progressing the LUMOS2 study in collaboration with key MoST investigators since the grant was awarded in January this year. We look forward to bringing this umbrella study of molecular guided therapies in recurrent lower grade glioma to patients and sites across Australia. Likewise, in parallel, Dr Hao-Wen Sim has led substantial progress in operations for the PICCOG study addressing PD-L1 Immunotherapy Checkpoint Combination for

Recurrent Glioma in patients with recurrent IDH1 mutant astrocytoma. I encourage all sites to consider an EOI to the recent feasibility survey distributed and contact [piccog.study@sydney.edu.au](mailto:piccog.study@sydney.edu.au) for any queries.

Another excellent post ASCO virtual seminar featuring key neuro-oncology studies was held on 22 June 2022, organised by the Outreach and Education Committee, chaired by Dr Jim Whittle and featuring an excellent Faculty comprising of Dr Angela Mweempwa (Medical Oncologist, NZ), Dr Hao-Wen Sim (Medical Oncologist, NSW), Dr Heidi McAlpine (Neurosurgeon, VIC) and Dr Kylie Jung (Radiation Oncologist, ACT).

The initial two domains of the MAGMA trial continues to recruit strongly with over 195 participants randomised across a record 26 of 28 planned sites. A new domain involving hypofractionated, shortened course adjuvant radiation, the SLAM concept, led by Dr Joseph Sia and Dr Jim Whittle will be submitted for MRFF funding imminently.

The upcoming Ideas Generation Workshop (IGW) will now be held virtually on Thursday 28 July 2022 with the workshop's new co-convenors Medical Oncologist Dr Annette Tognela and Translational Scientist Professor Bryan Day. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank A/Professor Benjamin Chua and A/Professor Kathryn Field for their significant contribution and mentorship as immediate past IGW co-convenors over the last several years. I strongly encourage COGNO members to continue to put forward their ideas and concepts for consideration at either the IGW or the face-to-face Scientific Advisory Committee meeting in October. I am very much looking forward to interacting again in person! The ASM program is shaping up very strongly under the leadership of A/Professor Benjamin Chua, Dr Hamish Alexander and the Organising Committee.

As always, I wish to thank the members of the COGNO network, Committee Leads as well as the COGNO staff and operations team for their ongoing work and commitment. Collectively, we are all contributing to improving outcomes for all those affected by brain tumours.

I hope you find the opportunity to take a break during June and July.

Associate Professor Eng-Siew Koh  
MBBS FRANZCR  
Group Chair

## SAVE THE DATE! 14<sup>th</sup> COGNO Annual Scientific Meeting



An engaging and informative program is being developed by our organising committee which will include highly regarded local and international speakers and satellite meetings, including a trainee workshop. You won't want to miss this year's ASM! To join our mailing list for regular updates, email [ctc.cognoasm@sydney.edu.au](mailto:ctc.cognoasm@sydney.edu.au) with your interest.

**Abstract submissions open next week, all COGNO members will be notified with additional information.**

Members of the neuro-oncology community and related professions are invited to submit abstracts for presentation as part of the COGNO Annual Scientific Meeting. Abstracts for both poster and oral presentations including original work in clinical, translational, allied health and supportive care research will be considered. Abstracts will be reviewed by a COGNO committee and scored on merit against pre-determined selection criteria. This is an opportunity to present your work to an international audience, as well as be in the running for awards.

There are four available awards:

- **BTAA Lynette Williams Award** - First prize of \$600 and second prize of \$400 for the best posters from any discipline in research related to supportive care for people with brain tumours.
- **Most Outstanding Oral Presentation** - \$500
- **Most Outstanding Poster Presentation** - \$500
- **Young Investigator Award** - to encourage clinicians and researchers early in their career to submit an abstract. \$500 will be awarded to the best poster or oral presentation meeting the eligibility criteria.

## SAVE THE DATE! Ideas Generation Workshop (Virtual)

The workshop will be targeted at identifying and developing concepts with the potential to be developed and/or incorporated into current and future clinical brain tumour trials. All submissions from any discipline are encouraged, particularly those with a focus on novel imaging and biomarker development.

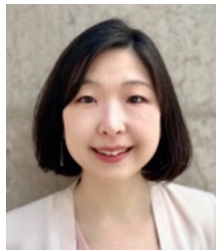
We encourage you to propose a novel idea or hypothesis and present your trial concept amongst other neuro-oncology clinicians and researchers in a supportive environment, who will assist, enrich, and help refine your idea. If you work with other clinicians and researchers who may be interested in presenting a concept at this forum, please reach out to them.

We will have the pleasure of welcoming [Prof David Ashley](#) as a guest speaker. *Submissions are welcome from all disciplines, at any stage of concept development. Please contact [ctc.cogno@sydney.edu.au](mailto:ctc.cogno@sydney.edu.au) for a concept form to complete and return by 5pm Thursday 14 July 2022.*

## POST ASCO PRESENTERS Virtual Seminar



Dr Jim Whittle  
Conference Chair  
COGNO Outreach &  
Education Committee



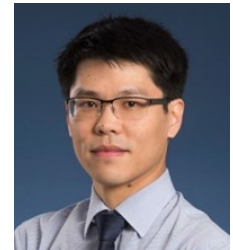
Dr Kylie Jung  
Radiation Oncologist  
ACT



Dr Heidi McAlpine  
Neurosurgeon  
VIC



Dr Angela Mweempwa  
Medical Oncologist  
NZ



Dr Hao-Wen Sim  
Medical Oncologist  
NSW

## GETTING TO KNOW BEN KONG



**Dr Ben Kong** is the Clinical Research Fellow for COGNO. Prior to joining COGNO, Ben trained in Medical Oncology at Westmead Hospital where he worked at the Clinical Trials Registrar and developed interests in immunotherapy and clinical trials. He completed his PhD in cancer immunology supported by a University of Sydney Merit Award and Sydney Catalyst Top-up Scholarship.

Since gaining his FRACP in 2015, Ben has worked at Concord Hospital, Melanoma Institute Australia and Prince of Wales Hospital as a Medical Oncologist and is currently appointed at Royal North Shore Hospital.

### What impact has COVID-19 had on your day-to-day activities?

My Covid experience could satisfy the conspiracy theorists; I was rostered on 3 times for Covid ward duty but our effective public health response meant that I never actually got to front-line experience the Covid wards. I was fortunate enough to be part of two COGNO trials (LUMOS and MAGMA) that opened and recruited through the numerous lockdowns. That was a great reminder to reflect upon how being flexible and adaptive could allow us to

do so much more in the non-pandemic setting.

### How did you become involved in COGNO? Why are you still a COGNO member?

My first experience with COGNO was presenting a poster at the 2014 COGNO ASM after encouragement from my then supervisor at Westmead Hospital, Dr Mark Wong. Perhaps it was a good thing that my registrar project flew under the radar a little because I came away thinking what a friendly bunch of people COGNO were and continued attending future ASM's. It took me another four years to work my way up to getting onto the stage to speak about my PhD research!

COGNO is unique amongst co-operative groups, being very multidisciplinary so there is a natural interaction between craft groups that we don't always experience in busy hospital clinics. To quote our former Prime Minister Keating, we live at the "...end of the world" and have a small population, so working together and making the most of our small and agile (pun not intended!) brain cancer community is the best way to achieve things that will ultimately benefit Australian patients. I value supporting this endeavour through my COGNO membership.

### Why did you become a medical oncologist and what triggered your interest in neuro-oncology research?

I can trace my interest in oncology to a gap year in Canada that I took away from my science degree to decide what to do with myself when I grew up. I recall reading a Scientific American article about Brian Druker and imatinib whilst killing time in Calgary waiting for a Greyhound bus to Toronto. This took my interest in science to the human stories and applications in medicine. Many years later, looking after patient's early phase immunotherapy studies at Westmead Hospital led me to do a PhD to learn more about immunology. GBM was a serendipitous interest area since my lab was interested in dendritic cell therapy. Seeing the numerous gaps between the bench side and the clinic has led me back to clinical trials and keeps me interested in ways to bridge that gap, particularly in neuro-oncology where there are so many unknowns.

### How do you stay motivated to continue in your role?

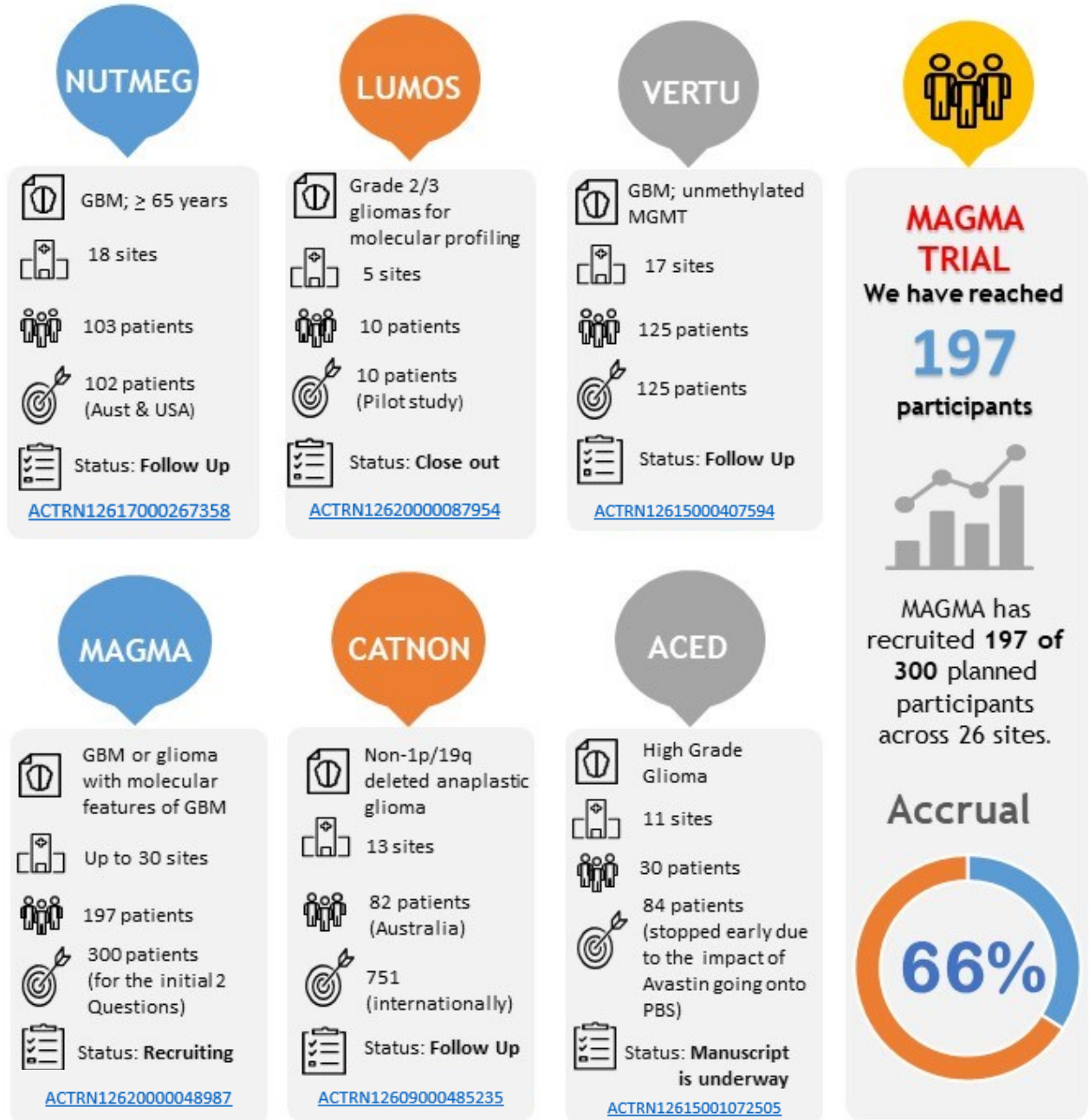
I will never forget the motto my high school rowing coach gave to me... "the harder I work, the luckier I get". Oncology research is much the same, happening over many years, requiring patience to ride through dead ends and wait for a result. Being around other people who are committed, cleverer than me and always having a common goal in mind keeps me motivated and hoping that luck will be on our side.

### What are you looking forward to in 2022?

Professionally I am looking forward to re-building personal connections with other researchers as much as possible. Personally, I am really looking forward to going skiing in July without the threat of a lockdown being announced the week before!

## TRIAL UPDATES

Thank you to all site personnel for their ongoing diligence in screening and enrolling patients and to all participants and their families for their participation and contributions to the COGNO trials to date.



## NEW CONCEPTS / TRIALS IN DEVELOPMENT

### Do you have an idea for a potential study?

The COGNO SAC (Scientific Advisory Committee) meets four times a year to assist with developing trial concepts. The next opportunity to present new concepts to SAC is during the COGNO ASM, on 17 October 2022. Concepts are due four weeks prior to each meeting. The concept submission form can be found on the COGNO website ([www.cogno.org.au](http://www.cogno.org.au)). During the SAC meeting, new protocols are presented by the proposer, and feedback is provided by clinical, translational, consumer and scientific members of the committee. If you have a great idea, you are welcome to contact the COGNO SAC to discuss how we can assist in concept development.

If you become aware of a funding opportunity during the year that might be of relevance to COGNO or for which you would like to involve COGNO in your application, please let us know! Under these circumstances, we can facilitate urgent COGNO SAC review and COGNO input to assist you in refining your proposal, building your team, and hopefully improving your chances of a successful application.

If you require any further information, please email [ctc.cogno@sydney.edu.au](mailto:ctc.cogno@sydney.edu.au).

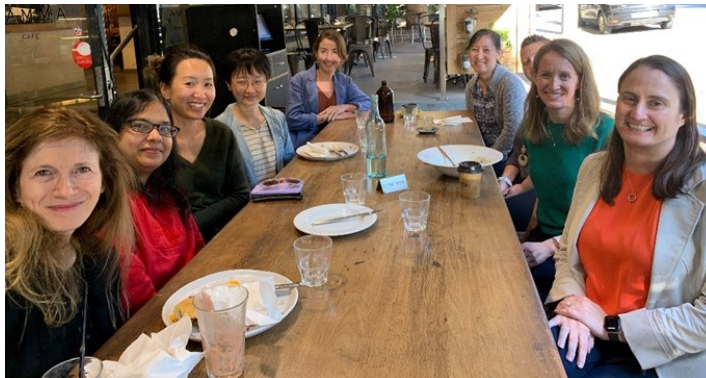
*Prof Hui Gan and Prof Bryan Day, on behalf of the COGNO SAC and COGNO community.*

### Important dates for noting:

- 19 September 2022 - Concepts due for presentation to SAC on 17 October 2022.

## COGNO STAFF UPDATE

**FAREWELL** - In May we farewelled Kirston Barton, COGNO's Research Development Lead. Kirston began working with COGNO in 2020 and has been an integral part of the team and will be greatly missed. We'd like to thank Kirston for her hard work and much-valued contribution to COGNO. We congratulate and wish her all the best in her new role at the Kirby Institute.



## MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

COGNO now has 885 members. Help us expand our Group's expertise and networking capacity. If you know someone who would like to join, you can refer prospective members to our online membership application on our website ([www.cogno.org.au](http://www.cogno.org.au)) or office ([cogno@cogno.org.au](mailto:cogno@cogno.org.au)).

## COGNO DONATIONS

Brain cancer patients are in desperate need of major research breakthroughs, yet brain cancer remains one of the most underfunded and under researched of all the cancer groups. Your donation will help COGNO bring clinical trials to more people with brain cancer.

Online donations can be made via [https://www.braincancercollective.com.au/donations\\_cogno](https://www.braincancercollective.com.au/donations_cogno)  
A special thanks to Brain Cancer Collective (BCC) for facilitating donations on COGNO's behalf.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### Medicines Access Portal (MAP)

MAP is an initiative of Medicines Australia and Rare Cancers Australia to better link clinicians and their cancer patients to special oncology access treatment, developed in collaboration with the Medical Oncology Group of Australia (MOGA), the Haematology Society of Australia and New Zealand (HSANZ), the TGA, PBAC, industry representatives and clinicians. The MAP website is a single, secure online portal for pharmaceutical companies to inform Australian medical practitioners of the existence of special access programs available to patients. Further details are available on the following links:

- <https://www.medicinesaustralia.com.au/media-release/map-offers-new-online-pathway-for-accessing-cancer-treatments/>
- <https://www.medicinesap.com/>

## REMINDERS

- 27 - 29 July 2022: Breast Cancer Trials 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Scientific Meeting, Melbourne, <https://www.bct2022.org/>
- 1 - 5 August 2022: Asia-Pacific Neuro-Oncology CME Conference, Hawaii, U.S, <https://cmecatalog.hms.harvard.edu/asia-pacific-neuro-oncology>
- 15 - 16 September 2022: NSW Cancer Conference, Sydney, <https://www.nswcancerconference.com.au/>
- 25 - 30 September 2022: ACORD22 Workshop, Online, <https://www.moga.org.au/acord-workshop>
- 16 - 18 October 2022: 14<sup>th</sup> COGNO Annual Scientific Meeting, Brisbane, <https://www.cogno.org.au/content.aspx?page=cognoasm-home>
- 2 - 4 November 2022: COSA 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Scientific Meeting, Brisbane, <https://www.cosaasm.org.au/>
- 14 - 17 November 2022: AGITG 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Scientific Meeting, Melbourne, <https://asm.gicancer.org.au/>
- 16 - 20 November 2022: SNO 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, Tampa Bay FL, U.S, <https://www.eventscribe.net/2022/SNO/>



### MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

A/Prof Eng-Siew Koh (Chair)  
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 A/Prof Georgia Halkett (Treasurer)  
 A/Prof Liz Hovey (Secretary)  
 Prof Meera Agar  
 Ms Marcia Fleet  
 Prof Hui Gan  
 Dr Ganessan Kichenadasse  
 Dr Adrian Lee  
 Ms Robyn Leonard  
 Dr Jonathon Parkinson  
 Dr Hao-Wen Sim  
 Mrs Desma Spyridopoulos  
 Dr James Whittle

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 Ms Liz Barnes  
 A/Prof Ben Chua  
 Prof Kate Drummond  
 Dr Kathryn Field  
 A/Prof Craig Gedye  
 Dr Ashray Gunjur  
 A/Prof Liz Hovey  
 A/Prof Lindy Jeffree  
 A/Prof Eng-Siew Koh  
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 A/Prof Michael Rodriguez  
 A/Prof Jeremy Ruben  
 Prof John Simes  
 Mrs Desma Spyridopoulos  
 Dr Annette Tognela  
 A/Prof Helen Wheeler

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