

COGNO Management Committee Elections 2024

Summary of 12 Nominees

(in alphabetical order)



Dr Hamish Alexander, Neurosurgeon, QLD

BSc(Hons) MBChB MPhil FRACS

New nomination

Proposer: Ms Vivien Biggs

Seconder: A/Prof Benjamin Chua

Dr Hamish Alexander is Neurosurgeon and Spine Surgeon based in Brisbane, Australia. Dr Alexander is a Consultant Neurosurgeon and Director of the Kenneth G Jamieson Neurosurgery Department, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital and in private practice with BrizBrain & Spine. He is a senior lecturer in the Department of Medicine, University of Queensland and a clinical associate with the Sid Faithful Brain Cancer Laboratory, QIMR Berghofer. Dr Alexander is the current vice president of the Neurosurgical Society of Australasia.

Dr Alexander completed his specialist neurosurgical training in New Zealand and Australia having earned undergraduate degrees in neuroscience and medicine at Otago University, NZ. He attained Fellowship of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in 2016

Neuro-oncology is the key focus of Dr Alexander's clinical and research work. He was awarded an M.Phil degree from the University of Queensland in 2015 for research on Immunotherapy for Glioblastoma and subsequently undertook a neurosurgical-oncology fellowship at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre in New York, USA in 2016-17.

He has been a Member of COGNO since 2013 and served as the co-convenor of the ASM in 2022.

Dr Alexander also has keen interests in neurotrauma, bio-fabrication and skull base/pituitary surgery.



Associate Professor Pascal Duijf, Translational Scientist, SA

BSc, MSc, PhD

New nomination

Proposer: A/Prof Craig Gedye

Seconder: Dr Rebecca Ormsby

Aiming to develop new treatments for brain cancer patients, I lead the Cancer Pharmacogenomics Laboratory at the Centre for Cancer Biology (CCB), University of South Australia (UniSA) in Adelaide. I trained in Cell Biology at Harvard Medical School (Boston MA, USA), hold a PhD degree in Human Genetics (Radboud University, the Netherlands) and trained as a postdoctoral fellow in Cancer Biology and Genetics at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre (MSKCC, New York NY, USA). I have subsequently been an independent Laboratory Head in Translational Cancer Research for 12 years, first in Brisbane and since last year at UniSA in Adelaide.

Earlier in my career, my research directly led to the development of two diagnostic tests for 8 congenital genetic diseases (*TP63* test, *TBX4* test), which are now routinely used in clinical diagnostics laboratories around the world.

More recently, my research group discovered that large genetic (chromosomal) defects, which occur in almost all brain cancers, are far better predictors of drug response than small genetic defects, like mutations. Thus, using large genetic defects as biomarkers or drug targets could markedly improve precision oncology.

To the COGNO Management Committee, I would contribute expertise in translational cancer research, molecular targeting and integration of genetic insights into clinical trials, which aligns well with COGNO's mission to advance precision neuro-oncology. This could guide development of biomarker-driven protocols and improve treatment efficacy in future trials, similar to LUMOS and VERTU.

I could also promote collaboration across clinical and research teams, in support of new trial designs. My experience in evaluating novel drug candidates could guide protocol innovation, strengthen COGNO's portfolio and expand treatment options for rare brain cancers. Finally, I could provide strategic insights for securing the funding essential for COGNO's ongoing and future trials.



Dr Saskia Freytag, Translational Scientist, VIC

Master of Statistical Sciences, PhD

New nomination

Proposer: Ms Lucy Riley

Secunder: Dr Robert Tobler

Saskia Freytag is a laboratory head in the Personalised Oncology Division at Walter and Eliza Hall Institute for Medical Research. Together with Dr Sarah Best and Dr Jim Whittle, Saskia co-leads the Brain Cancer Research Laboratory within the Brain Cancer Centre, where she leads the Bioinformatics arm. Her group uses cutting-edge single cell and spatial omics technologies to improve surgical methods, understand resistance mechanisms, and identify novel treatment strategies.

Saskia has a PhD in Statistical Genetics from Georg-August University in Göttingen (Germany), followed by postdoctoral positions at WEHI and the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research in Perth. Saskia has been supported by funding from Carrie's Beans for Brain Cancer (CB4BC), Cancer Australia, Cancer Council Victoria, the MRFF and the NHMRC.

In addition to her research career, Dr Freytag is deeply committed to fostering community and promoting inclusivity in science. She has chaired the Code of Conduct Committee of the international Bioconductor Project (Community Award 2024) and served as the ambassador for the Australian Mathematical Science Institute's CHOOSEMATHS program from 2016 to 2018.



Dr Lucy Gately, Medical Oncologist, VIC

PhD FRACP MBBS BSci Clin Dip Pall Med

New nomination

Proposer: Prof Mark Rosenthal

Seconder: A/Prof Anthony Dowling

Dr. Lucy Gately is an accomplished neuro-oncologist and early-career researcher, currently serving as the Head of Neuro-oncology, Cancer Genetics, and Clinical Innovation at Alfred Health. She is also an early-career researcher in the Personalised Oncology Division at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute. Dr. Gately holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) from the University of Melbourne, where she focused her research on neuro-oncology, specifically investigating biomarkers for long-term survival and survivorship in patients with glioblastoma. Her work has led to novel findings in both clinical and translational research, as well as in qualitative studies. Dr. Gately's research has garnered significant recognition, including the award of a Melbourne University Research Scholarship, a St Vincent's Research Endowment Fund and a Victorian Cancer Agency Early Career Fellowship for her pioneering contributions to neuro-oncology. These include: the BRAIN Registry, representing the largest comprehensive clinical and translational database in Australia and an invaluable research infrastructure; the world's first Phase III registry trial in neuro-oncology; and BIOBRAIN, an innovative multi-site project establishing a standardized pipeline for access to fresh tissue, the creation of organoid models, and omics and drug assays—matched to individual patient clinical data. In addition to her clinical and research leadership, Dr. Gately is an active member of the Brain Cancer Centre (BCC) and serves on the Operations Committee for the flagship Brain-Perioperative Program (BrainPOP). She is deeply committed to patient education and advocacy, having worked extensively with Cancer Council Victoria to improve the quality of information and support available to patients and their families.



Dr Andrew Gogos, Neurosurgeon, VIC

MBBS B Med Sci (Hons) FRACS

St Vincent's Public and Private Hospitals, VIC

New nomination

Proposer: A/Prof Tony Dowling

Secunder: Dr Liz Ahern

I am a neurosurgeon primarily from St Vincent's Public and Private Hospitals in Melbourne. My primary clinical interest is the surgical management of patients with brain tumours. My surgical and research focus is advanced techniques for pre and intra operative brain mapping to improve the safety and effectiveness of surgery.

In 2020, I completed a fellowship in Surgical Neuro-Oncology at the University of California, San Francisco under the guidance of Professor's Mitch Berger and Shawn Hervey-Jumper. I have published extensively in the field of neuro-oncology and have presented glioma basic science and surgical research at multiple national and international meetings.

With Dr Liz Ahern, I was co-convener of the 2024 COGNO ASM. I am committed to continuing CONGOs growth as the peak interdisciplinary neuro-oncology body in Australia. In particular, I would like to expand surgical representation within the group and continue to develop our ties with international collaborators and societies.



Dr Guillermo Gomez

Associate Professor in Precision Medicine in Neuro-oncology

Head, Tissue Architecture and Organ Function Laboratory

Centre for Cancer Biology, SA Pathology and The University of South Australia

New nomination

Proposer: Prof Hui Gan

Seconder: Prof Bryan Day

A/Prof Gomez performed his BSci(Hons) in Chemistry (2004), PhD (2008) and first postdoctoral position (2008-2010) at the National University of Cordoba in Argentina, where he acquired experience in cell biology, quantitative image analysis and computer programming. Then, during his postdoctoral training at the Institute for Molecular Bioscience, the University of Queensland, he implemented novel fluorescence microscopy technologies to study the mechanobiology of cell-cell interactions and how these contribute to tissue organisation in normal and pathological circumstances.

In 2017, he began his independent laboratory at the Centre for Cancer Biology, whose research focuses on Brain Cancer. His laboratory is well-known for its contribution to developing cutting-edge wet lab, imaging and computational approaches, including artificial intelligence, to study fresh tumour samples and the growth of patient-derived brain tumour organoids. These developments led to the establishment of cutting-edge preclinical research tools for identifying new molecular targets and developing new personalised therapies for brain cancer.

Dr Gomez's scientific achievements are highlighted by >88 publications in the fields of cell biology, mechanobiology, biophysics, artificial intelligence, and brain cancer (Hindex=41, >5,800 citations). These include research articles in Nature Cell Biology (x3), Nature Communications, British Journal of Cancer and BMC Biomedical Engineering, in which he is the first or corresponding author. Moreover, since independent, he has secured more than >\$20M in funding through nationally competitive grants, including ARC Future Fellowship, Cure Brain Cancer Foundation, Charlie Teo Foundation, Neurosurgical Research Foundation, and NHMRC Ideas grants as CIA.

A/Prof Gomez serves as a Section Editor for Heliyon (Cancer), Editorial Board member for the journals Organoids and Bio-Protocol, and a grant assessor for MRFF, NHMRC and ARC (Australia), Human Frontier Science Program (HFSP), the European Research Council (ERC), the European Science Foundation (ESF), the U.S.-Israel Binational Science Foundation, the Neurological Foundation (New Zealand), the Cancer Research Trust (New Zealand) and Cancer Council Victoria. He is also a Cancer Australia Expert Panel in Artificial Intelligence and Bioplatfroms Australia. He also serves as the Translational Research Lead at COGNO and Theme Lead in Artificial Intelligence at ABCARA.



Associate Professor Georgia Halkett, Psycho-oncology Researcher, WA
PhD, BMedRad(Hons), FASMIRT, GAICD

Renomination

Proposer: Prof Rosemary Harrup

Seconder: A/Prof Eng-Siew Koh

I am an Associate Professor at Curtin University and the Director of Graduate Research in the Curtin School of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences. I have been on the COGNO management committee since 2017 and previously held the role of honorary treasurer. I was one of three Inaugural Directors on the Board of COGNO Ltd and I have recently been re-elected.

In 2024 I was appointed to the Board of the Trans-Tasman Radiation Oncology Group and I previously served as a Board Member for the Australian Society of Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy (2017-2024).

I practiced as a radiation therapist before moving into research. My research focuses on supporting people with cancer and their carers by addressing psychosocial and information needs, communication between health professionals and cancer patients, survivorship and improving patient preparation for radiation therapy. I have been awarded research grants of more than \$6 million as lead investigator and \$12.5 million as contributing chief investigator. In early 2024 I completed a 4-year Cancer Council of WA Research Fellowship which supported my research position and program of research. To date, I have published 150 articles in International peer reviewed journals.

Since 2007 I have been leading projects focused on understanding and addressing the support needs of brain cancer patients and their carers. With funding from Cancer Australia, I led the Care-IS Trial, a randomised controlled trial of a supportive educational intervention for carers of patients with high-grade glioma (HGG). I recently presented this work as an invited speaker at the European Association of Neuro-Oncology annual conference. I am also a collaborating investigator on the MRFF BRAINS (**B**rain Cancer **R**ehabilitation **A**ssessment **I**ntervention for Survivorship **N**eeds) program of research. I have developed expertise in using different research methodologies including RCTs, mixed methods studies and qualitative exploratory studies and I have mentored Higher Degree by Research students in these methodologies.

My research interests are aligned with the priorities of COGNO. In 2021 I led a collaborative project to identify brain cancer research priorities for COGNO to lead, collaborate in and advocate for. I am keen to continue contributing to the COGNO management committee and Board. It is an exciting time for COGNO as it further develops as an independent company and builds its leadership in conducting brain cancer clinical trials in Australia and New Zealand.



Associate Professor Eng-Siew Koh, Radiation Oncologist

MBBS FRANZCR

Renomination

Proposer: A/Prof Hao-Wen Sim

Seconder: A/Prof Zarnie Lwin

I have had the honour of serving as Chair of the COGNO Network since October 2020 and am seeking re-nomination to the COGNO Management Committee and completion of my second three-year term as Chair, and also am a Director on the COGNO Ltd Board. Prior to this, I served as Deputy Chair of the COGNO Scientific Advisory Committee for over 5 years. My other leadership roles include Chair of COSA Neuro-oncology Group and have been invited faculty across various national (COSA, MOGA) and international forums including NZ and the Asia-Pacific (ASNO).

My professional contributions include education, training and advocacy in local, state and national brain tumour educational and research initiatives as well as consumer resources.

My clinical role is as a Senior Staff Specialist in Radiation Oncology, Liverpool Hospital and Conjoint Associate Professor at the University of New South Wales with over 20 years post fellowship experience in neuro-oncology care, clinical trials, imaging, supportive care and survivorship research across both adult and paediatric cancer. I have been a key investigator across a broad portfolio of successful Australian and international brain cancer trials including the COGNO trial portfolio over many years with over \$26m in Chief Investigator involvement. My academic leadership roles include co-principal investigator for the multi-site, prospective trial evaluating FET-PET In Glioblastoma (FIG) Study, TROG 18.06, the largest international trial of its kind. I have contributed to the international expert guidelines addressing PET RANO criteria in glioma and the current PET RANO brain metastases initiative.

My vision is to continue to lead and strengthen COGNO's profile and impact through delivery of a diverse and successful trial portfolio as well as forge strong member engagement through this important phase of COGNO's development as a collaborative trials group.



Associate Professor Kerryn Pike, Neuropsychologist QLD

DPsych (Clin Neuro) MAPS FCCN

New nomination

Proposer: A/Prof Haryana Dhillon

Seconder: A/Prof Eng-Siew Koh

Associate Professor Kerryn Pike is a Clinical Neuropsychologist and Associate Professor in the School of Applied Psychology at Griffith University, Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia. She also holds an adjunct position at La Trobe University (Melbourne). Kerryn is particularly interested in translating evidence-based neuropsychological interventions into clinical practice and Chairs the International Neuropsychological Society (INS)'s Special Interest Group on Neuropsychological Interventions, and the Australian Dementia Network (ADNeT) Cognitive Interventions Working Party. She also leads the cancer related cognitive impairment subgroup of the Multinational Association of Supportive Care in Cancer (MASCC) Neurological Complications Study Group and was on the 2023 COGNO ASM committee. Kerryn is one of the founders of the LaTCH memory management group program, designed to improve the everyday memory of people with mild cognitive impairment. She has adapted this for people with cancer and led the cognitive intervention arm of the Brain Cancer Mission Survivorship funded BRAINS program. This involved conducting a randomised controlled trial of LaTCH for people with brain tumours. As part of this study, unmet supportive care needs related to cognition became evident, as did the limited knowledge and training of health professionals in how to identify and manage these needs. Kerryn aims to address these gaps in future research. If elected to the COGNO management committee, Kerryn would advocate for any opportunities to incorporate supportive care within trials.



Dr Laveniya Satgunaseelan, Molecular Pathologist, NSW

MBBS (Hons) BMedSc (Hons) FRCPA

New nomination

Proposer: Dr Ashray Gunjur

Seconder: A/Prof Hao-Wen Sim

I am an anatomical and molecular pathologist, working full time in the Department of Neuropathology at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney. My main role is in the provision of molecular neuropathology services. Locally, I am the current secretary/treasurer of the Australia and New Zealand Society of Neuropathology, member of the Royal College of Pathologists Australasia (RCPA) Quality Assurance Program (QAP) for Neuropathology and co-convenor of the Neuropathology club in the Australasian Division of the International Academy of Pathology. I am an active member of the National Institute of Health (NIH) Clinical Genome Resource, where I co-chair both the Solid Tumour Taskforce and Histone H3 Somatic Cancer Variant Curation Expert Panel. I also serve as editor of the CNS chapter of the Compendium of Cancer Genomic Aberrations (CCGA), a collaborative project with the WHO International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). I am passionate about the provision of high-quality brain tumour diagnostics, and equity of access to cancer genomic services. Accurate brain tumour diagnosis is critical to neuro-oncology, which now increasingly involves molecular testing techniques. I therefore believe neuropathology representation on the COGNO Management Committee is important, and given my background in molecular pathology, that I would have valuable contributions to make.



Dr Joe Wei, Medical Oncologist, NSW

BBiomedSc BSc (Hon I) PhD MBBS FRACP

New nomination

Proposer: Dr Alexander Yuile

Seconder: Dr Ben Kong

Joe Wei is a Medical Oncologist working at Scientia Clinical Research, Prince of Wales Hospital, Armidale Hospital and Genesis Care. He obtained his Bachelor of Biomedical Science degree and a Ph.D in viral and cancer Immunology from the University of Melbourne. He completed a post-doctoral fellowship at Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research and published several basic science peer reviewed research papers on antigen processing and presentation, and T cell function and activation. He then completed medical school with the aim of becoming a Medical Oncologist. He successfully completed his Basic Physician Training at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Advanced Training in Medical Oncology at Royal North Shore Hospital and an early phase clinical trial fellowship at Westmead and Blacktown Hospitals, gaining his FRACP.

He has a passion for translational research, drug development, and early phase trials. He has published multiple peer reviewed articles on cancer immunotherapy and tumour microenvironment and actively involved with the Bill Walsh Lab working on brain cancer research. He is currently working at Scientia Clinical Research as a Principal Investigator and Sub-Investigator on more than 30 early phase clinical trials. He also has a passion for rural health and decentralised clinical trials with an aim to set up rural satellite clinical trial centres for better trials access for patients from rural areas.

Apart from involvement with COGNO on the scientific committee, he is also the scientific representative for Thoracic Oncology Group of Australasia. His goal to join the Management committee of COGNO is to help COGNO to increase recognition, increase funding, promote clinical trials and translational research.



Dr Jim Whittle, Medical Oncologist, VIC

BSc, MBBS, FRACP, PhD

Renomination

Proposer: Prof Rosemary Harrup

Secunder: A/Prof Eng-Siew Koh

Jim Whittle is a Neuro Oncologist at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre (PeterMac) and joint head of the Brain Cancer Research Laboratory at WEHI. Jim's research expertise and reputation are built on a deep understanding of basic biology, the development of patient-derived models for drug discovery, and clinical translation. His clinical research focuses on implementing novel Phase 0 (Perioperative) clinical trials as part of a paradigm shift in drug development.

An emerging leader in the field of Neuro-Oncology, Jim has an established institutional and national profile, currently serving on the management committee and chairing the Outreach and Education Committee for the Cooperative Group for Neuro Oncology (COGNO), as well as participating in various committees within the Society of Neuro Oncology (SNO). In 2023, Jim was appointed Co-Director of Research Strategy at the Brain Cancer Centre (Melbourne) and sits on the research advisory committee for the Mark Hughes Foundation Centre for Brain Cancer Research.

Reflecting a commitment to improving patient outcomes, Jim co-leads a team with Prof. Kate Drummond (RMH) developing an online survivorship platform braintumoursonline.org to provide reliable information, self-care tools, and a supportive community for Australians affected by brain tumours. He also focussed on improving the transition of care for paediatric patients with brain tumours into the adult setting and increasing equity of access for Adolescents and Young Adults (AYAs) with brain tumours to enrol on clinical trials.

These contributions to COGNO and the broader Neuro Oncology community make him a valuable candidate for the COGNO Management Committee.