

# Monash medical students awarded prestigious VMIAL scholarships

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Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences

School of Clinical Sciences at Monash Health

## Weekly eNews

Generous scholarships from Victorian Medical Insurance Agency Ltd (VMIAL) are enabling Monash medical students' research into autoimmune disease and cervical spine injury.

Medical students Ms Emily Lin and Ms Helen Huang were awarded prestigious PSA Insurance Bachelor of Medical Science (Honours) Scholarships this year to undertake a year of research at the School of Clinical Sciences at Monash Health (SCS).

Funded by VMIAL, the PSA Insurance scholarships cover the students' course fees and on-campus accommodation. A feature of these scholarships is the recipients' opportunity to provide tutoring and mentoring to junior medical students residing in campus accommodation.



*Dr Colette Reeves, Ms Helen Huang, Ms Emily Lin, Professor Eric Morand, and Dr John Locke*

VMIAL Board members Dr Colette Reeves and Dr John Locke visited the School of Clinical Sciences last week to meet the scholarship recipients and to hear about their research activities.

"My project focuses on systemic sclerosis (SSc), an autoimmune connective tissue disorder of which the causes are unknown," Emily said.

"I'm investigating the relationship between SSc and several cytokines and have found that specific cytokines are associated with specific subtypes of SSc. This information can be used to help understand how SSc develops and may inform the development of future therapies."

Emily said the PSA Insurance scholarship has made a significant and positive contribution to her educational experiences.

"As a part of the scholarship, I was given the opportunity to mentor and teach junior medical students, which I really enjoyed and overall resulted in my BMedSc(Hons) year being an integrated and fulfilling experience," Emily said.

"I've been introduced to the exciting world of research with all its hurdles and steep learning curves, developed a passion to pursue research as a clinician-scientist, and have become involved in the guidance and education of

junior medical students!”

“I’m incredibly grateful for the growth and support I’ve experienced this year from the Rheumatology Research Group at Monash Medical Centre, the BMedSc(Hons) course, and VMIAL for their benefaction and encouragement in the pursuit of knowledge.”

Fellow student and scholarship recipient Helen Huang is investigating suspected cervical spine injury (CSI), a common presentation in Emergency Departments.

“Despite frequent use of cervical spine immobilisation, there is limited evidence for this practice in a low-risk, non-major trauma setting,” Helen said.

“My research has shown that while the rate of imaging and immobilization is high, the actual incidence is low, and there is scope to reduce the rate of cervical spine imaging and immobilisation in some patients without causing additional harms.”

Helen said the generous scholarship awarded by VMIAL has provided her with multiple opportunities that would not have otherwise been possible.

“One of my personal highlights was mentoring younger students – it gave me a chance to keep up to date on my clinical knowledge, but also to teach other students, the latter being a valuable skill to carry into my future career.”

“It’s been a pleasure mentoring my students, not just on pure knowledge, but also advice on how to tackle medical school, and its various challenges.”

“Another highlight has been the opportunity to live on campus, and participate in campus and college life,” Helen said.

“This has allowed me to meet people of many different backgrounds and form friendships that I will value for the rest of my life.”

Helen is especially grateful for the financial donation provided by the scholarship.

“My project this year was prospective, and therefore fairly intense. However, having the scholarship meant that I was able to dedicate a substantial amount of my time and focus to my project and recruiting patients, which would not have otherwise been possible, as I usually work part-time to support my studies.”

When we think of projects to support deserving medical students, in collaboration with Monash University, we hope that the intended outcome, which is to make their life that little bit easier during such a demanding period of study, meets our objectives,” said Mr Sylvain Mani, CEO, VMIAL.

“This certainly appears to be the case here after hearing what Emily and Helen say on the impact of these scholarships.”

“As our company crosses over its 90<sup>th</sup> birthday we remain committed to the purpose upon which VMIAL was founded back in 1926 in not only providing tailored insurance solutions exclusively to doctors and dentists but, just as importantly, ploughing back into these professions in a most tangible way.”

“These stories and experiences which we’ve witnessed across all of the universities that offer our scholarships, encourage us to not only maintain these activities but also continue in our efforts to support as best we can young doctors and dentists,” Mr Mani said.

BMedSc(Hons) course convenor Dr Megan Wallace said the research degree allows high achieving medical students and graduates, the opportunity to undertake a formal year of research.

“The BMedSc(Hons) year gives students a strong grounding in research skills, improves their critical thinking and enhances their capacity to practice evidence-based medicine,” Dr Wallace said.

“It’s really wonderful that VMIAL provide these PSA Insurance Scholarships for our Honours students. The scholarship allows the recipients to focus more time on their research and to give something back to the profession by helping junior medical students prepare for medical practice!”