

SCS medical student's research provides insight into infectious disease

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A history of chicken pox is very likely to predict immunity to varicella zoster, according to latest research from Monash University.

Published this week in the high impact journal *AIDS*, the research study was led by School of Clinical Sciences at Monash Health (SCS) medical student Greta Gurry.

The findings from this study suggest that blood testing for varicella serology ([chicken pox](#) or shingles) in HIV patients with a history of these diseases is not necessary as these patients already have protective antibodies.

"While this correlation has previously been demonstrated in healthy populations, Greta's study is the first to show this in an immunocompromised cohort," said Dr Ian Woolley, Deputy Director of Infectious Diseases and Director of HIV Medicine at Monash Medical Centre.

"As well as avoiding unnecessary blood tests, this study provides us with the evidence that we don't need to expose people with weakened immune systems to the chicken pox vaccine."

Because the chicken pox vaccine is a live vaccine, there are risks associated with administering it to HIV patients.

A fourth year [medical student](#), Greta undertook a Bachelor of Medical

Science (BMedSc) in 2014 with Monash Infectious Diseases under the supervision of Infectious Diseases Physician and SCS Clinical Dean Dr Claire Dendle and Dr Ian Woolley, and has already achieved two publications in prestigious journals.

"The results of Greta's thesis—whether evidence of latent infections common in resource-poor countries was present in a cohort of patients living with HIV—were published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* in March this year," said Dr Dendle.

"Greta also showed that systematic screening in our population for schistosomiasis and strongyloidiasis was justified and should be included in Australian guidelines as it is in European guidelines," added Dr Woolley.

In addition to her publications, Greta was invited to speak at the Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases 2015 Annual Scientific Meeting in Auckland.

"This a terrific demonstration of our BMedSc students making a meaningful contribution to clinical science as well as learning how to undertake research and finding out whether it could be part of their future career." said Dr Dendle.

"Undertaking a BMedSc at SCS was a fantastic experience and one that I highly recommend," said Greta.

"A BMedSc is an excellent opportunity to learn skills in research without the added pressure of working or studying concurrently, allowing you to take the time to comprehend numerous aspects of research."

"The support I received from my supervisors Dr Ian Woolley and Dr Claire Dendle, along with the entire ID department, allowed me to

expand my knowledge in this area as well as enjoy my year immensely!"

Provided by Monash University

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