

Improved digital healthcare focus of 3-year Fellowship

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In an increasingly digital world, the 2023 Father Frank Flynn Fellowship is focused on enhancing the Northern Territory's capacity for health informatics.

Funded by the Northern Territory Government Department of Health, this Fellowship has been awarded to Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) Honorary Clinical Research Fellow and Nephrologist, Associate Professor [Asanga Abeyaratne](#).

Health informatics looks at the intersection of people, technology and data. It works to enrich healthcare delivery by increasing productivity, supporting patient safety and helping to overcome some healthcare workforce resourcing limitations.

It has been identified as a priority area of health research for the NT. Over the next 3 years, this Fellowship is designed to build leadership and capacity in managing health data, grow digital health, and analyse and identify health and disease trends.

Working within Menzies's Wellbeing and Preventable Chronic Diseases Division, A/Prof Abeyaratne will develop and lead a program in health informatics. The program's goal is to improve the safety and quality of patient care by working with health organisation partners across the NT.

A/Prof Abeyaratne has a strong understanding of health informatics. He is the clinical lead of [Territory Kidney Care \(TKC\)](#) and led the design of the expert system that underpins the software's clinical functions.

TKC works to seamlessly consolidate health data and extract clinically relevant summaries. The Fellowship will build upon this innovation to cement the Territory as a global leader in this discipline.

The Father Frank Flynn Fellowship was established in 1989, in recognition of Father Frank Flynn, an ophthalmologist and priest, known for his outstanding dedication to improving the health of Territorians.

The Fellowship supports the appointment of a senior researcher to conduct high quality, multi-disciplinary research that assists improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and focuses on remote and tropical health. The 3-year appointment also looks to advance health informatics research findings locally, nationally and internationally. This role will contribute to policy discussions and planning processes to enhance the health of all Territorians.

Quotes attributable to 2023 Father Frank Flynn Fellowship recipient, Menzies Honorary Clinical Research Fellow and nephrologist, Associate Professor Asanga Abeyaratne:

"Health informatics is a powerful translation tool which is vital to bridge the gap between research and clinical practice. With this Fellowship, I'm striving to create digital health processes that will empower both healthcare professionals, researchers and patients.

"Digital health places our patients at the core and enables them to take greater ownership of their healthcare. Creation of these systems will allow Territorians to easily access

individualised health advice, as technology helps to tell the story of where they have been, where they are now and where they are going, in terms of health.

“I look forward to leading advancements in health informatics, to enhance the Territory’s capacity in our increasingly digital world.”

Quotes attributable to Menzies School of Health Research, Director, Professor Alan Cass:

“Menzies is committed to supporting pathways that enhance both the health workforce and healthcare capacity of the Northern Territory, and health informatics will allow us to do both.

“Territory Kidney Care represents an example of how technology can enrich healthcare. Creating digital algorithms to provide clinically relevant information, and bringing this information to health professionals when they see their patients, helps empower healthcare professionals to provide safe and efficient care, and will also help patients to access their health story.”

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Media contact:

Phone: (08) 8946 8680 | Email: media@menzies.edu.au

Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies is one of Australia’s leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and a leader in global and tropical research into life-threatening illnesses. Menzies continues to translate research into effective partnerships and programs in communities across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.