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Lifestyle the best medicine: Annual appeal supporting research into health and wellbeing

Brenton Stacey

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One of the world's leading health and exercise scientists describes the power of "low tech" for remedying problems created by "high tech" as one of the most exciting medical discoveries of the past few decades.

"Scientific evidence is showing that returning to a simple lifestyle is often the best way to manage and treat chronic disease," says Dr Darren Morton, a senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education whose doctorate is in human physiology. "It seems lifestyle is the best medicine."

Avondale is making a contribution through its new Lifestyle Research Centre (LRC) implementing its motto "optimising health outcomes."

The centre brings together academics from Avondale and other entities. Morton, a lead researcher, is described by The Wall Street Journal as the world's "most-published authority" on the stitch. The director Dr Brett Mitchell, an associate professor of nursing states, "Thomas Edison once said the doctor of the future will give no medicine but interest his patients in the cause and prevention of disease. This is exactly what the centre's about and why its work is so important."

Current work includes partnering with Sanitarium Health and Wellbeing to relaunch and study the Complete Health Improvement Programs (CHIP). Dr Paul Rankin researched this lifestyle intervention for his PhD completed through Avondale. He found the delivery of CHIP by volunteer facilitators in their communities significantly improves the health of participants.

The research by Rankin and others in the Lifestyle Research Centre is establishing credibility in the medical community. Published papers have appeared in academic journals such as the British Medical Journal Open, the New Zealand Medical Journal and the Medical Journal of Australia.

Research presented in the latter measured an increase in hospital-identified *Clostridium difficile* infections. The message: we need to standardise

cleaning practices and products.

Mitchell, a co-author of the paper, is a chief investigator on a National Health and Medical Research Council grant implementing and evaluating the effectiveness and cost of targeted environmental cleaning practices in 20 Australian hospitals. "I've gone into research to make a difference," he says. "That's why the work of the Lifestyle Research Centre is important—our projects are sustainable, cost effective and improve lives."

Giving to the Avondale Annual Appeal this year will support two of the centre's projects - Lifestyle Intervention and Infection Prevention.

The centre is contributing by studying the effectiveness of a modified CHIP for illiterate communities in the South Pacific and by offering postgraduate degrees in lifestyle medicine. Other areas of interest include avoidable blindness, education programs about non-communicable diseases, medical humanities, mental health and wellbeing and nutrition.

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If the evidence is showing lifestyle is the best medicine, then the Adventist health message "is arguably more relevant today than when it was conceived," says Morton. "And that's exciting because we have the potential to help others become healthier and happier." **TEACH**