We highlight some of the fascinating research making an impact in the health arena and beyond. These studies have been published in recent editions of *International Innovation* and are available in full online.

**IN PERSON**

**UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND**

Caspar Peek outlines the key challenges facing sexual and reproductive healthcare and rights in Thailand, explaining how the organisation is working to guarantee young people reach their maximum potential.

**AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR REPRODUCTIVE MEDICINE**

Reflecting on her 2013 presidency, Dr Linda Giudice, current President-Elect of the World Endometriosis Society and a leader in research on the impact of the environment on reproductive health, explains how ASRM is improving advocacy, education and research in reproductive medicine worldwide.

**A BATTLE AGAINST INFECTION**

Throughout the ages, epidemics have devastated populations. The 14th Century Black Death killed between 30 and 50 per cent of the world’s population; the 1918 Spanish flu is thought to have killed more people than died in World War I; and HIV/AIDS continues to claim millions of lives. Viruses that reach pandemic proportions are united by an uncontrolled and invisible spread and, historically, poorly understood method of contagion.

In her address at the 64th session of the World Health Organization Regional Committee for Europe, Director-General Dr Margaret Chan stated: “The world is ill prepared to respond to any severe, sustained and threatening public health emergency”. Here, *International Innovation* asks a selection of health experts: how might the situation be ameliorated in virology?

Pekka Puska (International Association of Public Health Institutes)

You can always say that the world is not prepared enough. A particular problem is that, in spite of general and important preparations, many emergencies seem to be unlike the previous ones and have unexpected features. High-income countries in particular are rather well prepared for the ‘known’ epidemics and emergencies. The problem is in low- and middle-income countries, where health services and society as a whole encounter significant difficulties in dealing with such things. The big challenge in global public health is to do a better job in preventing or restricting the spread of new epidemics in the areas of their origin. This calls for support for both specific activities and more general development assistance, particularly in low-income countries.
FERTILE GROUND

Dr Hiromitsu Tanaka from the Nagasaki International University in Japan discusses the problems facing male fertility and his latest work into germ cell development that he hopes will improve understanding and offer new solutions to this pervasive condition.

ACCOUNTABLE AFRICAN MATERNAL HEALTHCARE

In a joint project, a VU University and KIT Amsterdam transdisciplinary team is investigating the impact of accountability mechanisms on improving maternal outcomes during childbirth. Professor Tjard de Cock Buning is one such researcher dedicated to using community-based, interactive learning and action approaches to refine healthcare systems in Central Africa.

PREVENTING PRE-ECLAMPSIA

Funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, an international clinical trial is investigating the effect of folic acid supplementation in pregnancy on pre-eclampsia. Drs Mark Walker and Shi Wu Wen discuss their clinical studies of a potential new treatment for this leading cause of maternal deaths.

DRIVING A NEW DISCIPLINE

Drs Marianne Wessling-Resnick, Chih-Hao Lee and Andrea Baccarelli at the Harvard School of Public Health explain their own research efforts and the implementation of a new interdisciplinary life sciences course, aiming to respond to the need for outstanding environmental health scientists who are able to operate at the intersection of molecular and genomic biology, epigenetics and biostatistics.

DEPRESSION PREVENTION

Dr Benjamin W Van Voorhees from the University of Illinois at Chicago explains why he believes that adolescence offers an underutilised window of opportunity to teach young people the coping skills and resilience needed to effectively deal with depression using a technology-based behavioural vaccine. It is hoped that this method’s wide availability will protect adolescents from depressive episodes.

THE CAUSAL PERSPECTIVE IN HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH

Around 100,000 coronary revascularisations are performed every year in Canada. Researchers at the University of British Columbia are conducting innovative health services studies to compare outcomes between methods. Professor Boris Sobolev is one such scientist working at the forefront of health services and outcomes research.