



Biotech Hopeful in WA

A team of scientists investigating a new cancer treatment has become the first WA group to receive backing from the Medical Research Commercialisation Fund (MRCF). Prof Peter Leedman and his team at the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) gained positive results while studying the anti-cancer properties of the molecule microRNA-7, and were granted \$650,000 to conduct extensive pre-clinical testing to verify their results and establish MiReven, a company that will commercialise the project.



■ Prof Peter Leedman, Deputy Director of WAIMR

Prof Leedman and his team have been conducting research into microRNA-7 for around five years and have owned the intellectual property patent on the molecule since 2006.

“It’s a very active area where people are realising these molecules could be clinically significant in a vast number of areas, not just in cancer,” he said.

There is little doubt that microRNA research is big business. Last June, Paris-based biopharmaceutical company

Regulus Therapeutics secured an initial \$25m investment from Sanofi-Aventis, with a potential follow-up payment of \$10m, to commercialise microRNA products for treating fibrosis. Taking into account future research funding, royalty payments and progress incentives, the 3-5 year alliance is estimated to be worth up to \$750m.

MircoRNAs are a group of thousands of molecules that occur naturally in the body. Prof Leedman’s research has shown that microRNA-7 is effective in reducing cancers related to the Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor (EGFR), such as those affecting the lung, breast, pancreas, prostate, colon, and head and neck.

“It’s what’s called a tumour-suppressor microRNA, which means it’s present in normal tissue and it’s completely abolished in cancer. We are replacing microRNA-7 into these tumours and tumour cells, both in cells in culture but also now in mice, and we are very excited about the activity of microRNA-7 at being able to reduce the signalling down the EGF receptor pathway.

“One of the most remarkable things that we find is that it’s not just targeting one part of the pathway; it co-ordinately targets multiple aspects of the pathway, which essentially is what cancer treatment is moving towards. It’s just now in the middle of pre-clinical studies to test a lot of cell cultures, so we’ll know a lot of those results in about a year’s time.

“With a bit of luck you might see microRNAs within the next four or five years in very specific disease therapeutics.”



WORKERS’ COMP
MATTERS



By Michelle Reynolds
Chief Executive Officer, WorkCover WA

Survey of injured workers

Injured workers consider their doctor to be a key partner in their recovery and return to work.

It will be no surprise to you to know that in recent research commissioned by WorkCover WA, 88% of injured workers reported visiting a medical practitioner as part of their injury management. More than 72% of those injured workers nominated their doctor as integral in helping them return to work, not only assisting with their recovery, but also discussing return to work options and making regular contact to monitor progress.

The Injured Workers Survey reported overwhelmingly positive results from 704 injured workers, with 90% returning to work at some time within 10 months of submitting their claim.

Ninety per cent of respondents had no trouble obtaining the medical treatment or services they needed. More generally, 87% thought the workers’ compensation process was open and honest, and 83% believed they were treated fairly.

There are opportunities for improvement, with results showing less positive outcomes for those off work for extended periods. The longer a worker is away from work the less likely it is they will successfully return to their workplace.

Getting injured workers safely back to the workplace as quickly as possible is fundamental to improving their longer term outcomes.

If you would like to see the complete Injured Workers Survey, go to www.workcover.wa.gov.au

WorkCover WA is the government agency responsible for overseeing the workers’ compensation and injury management system in Western Australia.



Advisory Services call centre 8am – 5pm weekdays 1300 794 744