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TWO-PRONGED ATTACK NEEDED IN MESOTHELIOMA

The WAIMR-hosted National Research Centre for Asbestos Related Diseases (NRCARD) recently held its annual scientific meeting in Perth, with University of Pennsylvania Professor Steve Albelda flying in to be part of the event.

Professor Albelda told the meeting that the greatest chances of success in treating mesothelioma patients into the future would involve a two-pronged attack combining existing and new therapies.

"Existing treatments for mesothelioma really only do half the job in tackling the disease, so researchers across the globe are looking for ways increase a patient's quality and length of life after diagnosis," he said.

"An area that holds much promise, we believe, is combining tumour surgery or chemotherapy with treatments, such as vaccines, that can boost the body's own immune system response and help us stop mesothelioma in its tracks."

NRCARD Director Professor Bruce Robinson said this two-pronged approach offered much hope for the future.

"Because, for example, not all mesothelioma patients benefit from chemotherapy, combined therapy is one of the key next steps in being able to deliver better results for those affected by it," he said.

Professor Albelda praised the world-leading Australian researchers and their discoveries in the area of mesothelioma.

"The concept of formally uniting the best researchers this country has to offer in the area of mesothelioma is an innovative approach and something I'd be hoping to be able to mirror in the United States," he said.



Professor Albelda

WAIMR WELCOMES NEW STAFF

WAIMR has welcomed two new key staff members in recent times.

Tony Hume has joined the Institute in a newly-created role. Mr Hume, who has extensive management experience over 17 years spanning commercial and education roles, has become the Institute's Manager for Organisational Advancement with responsibility for directing and managing the Institute's fundraising activities. He comes to WAIMR from Edith Cowan University.

The other new appointment has seen Peter Taylor take on the role of Manager – People & Performance.



Peter Taylor



Tony Hume

Mr Taylor has extensive experience in a variety of human resource roles over the past 20 years and joins WAIMR from accounting and business advisory firm RSM Bird Cameron where he spent eight years as HR manager.

In that role he designed and implemented a national graduate recruitment programme, organised major annual national conferences, and established and developed HR and training with the firm.

A former secondary school teacher, Mr Taylor has also worked with Community Newspaper Group and Home Building Society. He has been a member of the Australian Human Resources Institute since 1988, where he has been an active participant in ongoing professional development.



OUR 10-YEAR MILESTONE

Now a central part of the State's scientific community and the leader of a new project changing the landscape of medical research in WA, the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) has much to celebrate during its 10th anniversary year in 2008.

WAIMR Director Professor Peter Klinken said while the Institute would be reflecting on its important history throughout 2008, it was also keeping more than a keen eye on the future.

"We have certainly experienced some exciting times in the 10 years since we began in 1998, but I think it's fair to say that the decade ahead holds the promise of even more important breakthroughs and, indeed, a new era in medical research in WA," he said.

"As the main driver of the construction of two new cutting-edge research facilities, we are very aware that our future will see even more collaboration between WA scientists and that is something the entire community will benefit from.

"The more knowledge our top minds can share, the more successful we will be at delivering world-class research breakthroughs that boost the health of the entire community."

One new research facility will be built at QEII Medical Centre in Nedlands and the other at the forthcoming Fiona Stanley Hospital in Murdoch.

Over the past 10 years, WAIMR has helped pinpoint genes linked to leukaemia, breast, ovarian and prostate cancer, as well as those contributing to a number of nerve and muscle disorders.

"We have attracted some of the world's finest scientists into WA and are well positioned to continue to deliver life-changing findings in the years ahead," Professor Klinken said.

"None of our achievements would have been possible without

the late Harry Perkins, who played a key role in our formation. Harry believed it would prove difficult to recruit and retain the best doctors to WA which would, in turn, impact health care to the community.

"He was a man of vision and, as our inaugural Chairman, he also managed to secure us what is still one of the largest corporate donations ever made to medical research in Australia – a \$5 million grant from Wesfarmers, so we take this opportunity to again say, 'thank you' and, in particular, express our gratitude to then CEO Michael Chaney."



WAIMR Director Professor Peter Klinken & Deputy Director Professor Peter Leedman

Professor Klinken also paid tribute to WAIMR's other generous supporters including The University of WA, the State and Federal Governments – which have contributed almost \$200 million dollars to the creation of the two new research facilities in WA – Bankwest, and many private donors from across the local business community.

"Everyone, from volunteers for our research studies to those who give up their time to help our fundraising activities and those community members who give financially to our work, is integral to our success and we honour them for their contributions."

In October, WAIMR hosted a cocktail function to thank our sponsors for their valuable support. The night was a tremendous success and the Institute is now planning more events

to celebrate our 10 year milestone.

The key event will be held on March 15 next year with the launch of our inaugural White Coats. BlackTies. Ball which will be an evening of glitz and glamour beginning with pre-dinner drinks under the stars and featuring the talents of Perth jazz sensation Libby Hammer and her band Hip Mo' Toast.

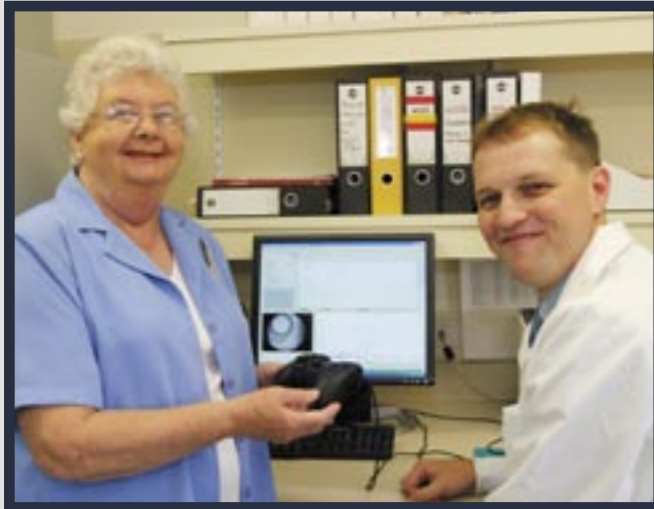
For information about the event, please call (08) 9224 0333.

SEARCHING FOR “DIABESITY” TESTS

Hundreds of West Australians with diabetes will help scientists at the State’s Centre for Food & Genomic Medicine (CFGM) search for new medical tests to help tackle the growing diabesity epidemic.

The details of the project were announced at the official launch of the CFGM by West Australian Minister for Industry and Enterprise Francis Logan on World Diabetes Day on November 14.

Scientists undertaking the research will make use of WA’s new \$1.5m state-of-the-art Proteomics Facility to search for proteins in the blood that might serve as markers of diabesity.



Diabetes patient Maureen Hume with Proteomics International's Dr Scott Bringans

“We believe there are biomarkers, or proteins in the blood, that can act as early warning signs that a person might be more likely to fall victim to diabesity,” said WAIMR Professor and the Centre’s Scientific Head Peter Leedman.

“Using these proteins, new treatments may be able to be developed and simple tests created that could accurately predict and diagnose those at risk of these diseases in a bid to slash some of the serious health problems they cause.

“The biomarkers may also help us predict those with diabetes who will go onto develop serious complications, such as kidney and eye disease. Biomarkers are being used in the cancer area, and we are keen to use them to help beat the diabetes and obesity crisis.”

The Proteomics Facility, which is part of the Lotterywest State Biomedical Facility, would be integral in allowing the diabesity research to take place.

Dr Richard Lipscombe, the Managing Director of Proteomics International, the WA biotechnology company which runs the Proteomics Facility, said it was a welcome resource.

“This research facility is among the best in the southern hemisphere, so we fully expect it to be used widely. Not only have we opened the door for local researchers to gain the benefits, but also the provision of services to India and China,” said Dr Lipscombe.

WAIMR Director Professor Peter Klinken said WA could now compete with the world leaders in this area of research, as well as attract investment dollars.

NEW BREAD MAY AID DIABETES FIGHT

Earlier this year, the team at the CFGM announced their discovery that a new high-protein, low-carbohydrate loaf made from lupins could prove useful in the fight against diabesity.

The locally-made lupin bread has shown it can help people reduce their meal sizes and curb hunger.

Study leader and UWA researcher Jonathan Hodgson said study volunteers who ate lupin bread consumed 25 to 30 per cent less energy during their meal.

“The study volunteers who ate lupin bread for breakfast not only cut their energy intake for that meal, they also consumed 15 to 20 per cent less energy for lunch and said they felt less hungry between breakfast and lunch,” Dr Hodgson said.

“Because lupin kernel flour is high in protein and fibre with almost no carbohydrates, it may help to reduce a person’s appetite and overall energy intake for the day, making it easier to control body weight.

“Obesity is a contributing factor for many serious health problems including type 2 diabetes and heart disease, so this bread could also be crucial in stemming growing health epidemics in our community.”

The four week study involved 16 participants with a body mass index of more than 25 who were given lupin and regular white

bread sandwiches for breakfast and lunch.

The bread, called Slimmer’s Choice, was developed by Fremantle’s Bodhi’s Bakehouse in conjunction with UWA’s School of Medicine.

“We have begun a 12-month study to investigate the potential for lupin bread to help people lose weight and maintain a healthy weight after slimming down, as well as monitoring the effect it has on risk factors for heart disease,” Dr Hodgson said.



Dr Hodgson with the lupin bread

YOUNG SCIENTIST IS PREMIER’S PICK

A passion for helping patients with devastating muscle disorders has helped WAIMR’s Dr Kristen Nowak take out one of WA’s top science awards.

In October, Dr Nowak was announced as the winner of the Premier’s Prize for Early Career Achievement in Science 2007 at a ceremony held at Scitech.

The prize recognises a scientist under the age of 35 who has demonstrated excellence in their field of science in Western Australia.

WAIMR Professor Nigel Laing, who is also Dr Nowak’s supervisor, said he was thrilled Kristen had been honoured for her outstanding career in medical research.

“At just 32, Kristen has achieved much success in her field, having already made some enormously exciting discoveries that have made a real difference in the lives of people with muscle diseases,” he said.

“Not only have people in Western Australia and across the country benefited from the research done by Kristen and her colleagues, but patients worldwide have gained also.”

In 1999, Dr Nowak discovered that defects in a particular gene could cause multiple skeletal muscle diseases – a previously unknown cause – and went on to develop a tool leading to the establishment of world-wide screening centres, including one based in Perth, to diagnose the disease.

Dr Nowak, who was presenting her research at the 12th International Congress of the World Muscle Society in Italy when she was announced as the winner, thanked the State Government for its support of science in WA.

“It’s an honour to be recognised for my work and to be able to be part of such a vibrant, growing medical research community in WA,” she said.



Dr Kristen Nowak

“The support I have received from the head of my laboratory, Professor Nigel Laing, has been amazing and we’re very excited that our work has helped give many families much needed answers.”

CRUCIAL MUSCLE CULTURE DISCOVERY

A WAIMR PhD student and a local biotechnology company have combined to create a more advanced technique for analysing mature skeletal muscle in culture – a technique which could help fast-track breakthroughs in treating muscle diseases.

WAIMR’s Gina Ravenscroft, who spearheaded the method, was able to collaborate with Dr Sam Gallagher from Molecular Discovery Systems, a wholly owned subsidiary of ASX-listed Perth biotech company BioPharmica Ltd, in order to make the method even more invaluable.

The technique has been detailed in a paper published in the October issue of the journal Cell Motility and the Cytoskeleton.

Professor Nigel Laing, who heads WAIMR’s Laboratory for Molecular Genetics where the technique was established, said this advance was of great benefit.

“We’ve been able to use a new method that enables us to culture skeletal muscle in the laboratory which is more mature than cultures we’ve been able to create in the past,” he said.

“The potential of this is vast as it gives us a better platform to



PhD student Gina Ravenscroft

screen drugs that may be able to be used to treat diseases of skeletal muscle.”

Professor Laing’s laboratory was the first to discover mutations in two fundamental muscle genes, actin and myosin, which cause muscle diseases.

WESFARMERS "THANK YOU" DAY HONOUR

WA-based Wesfarmers Limited has been honoured at a national awards ceremony for its long-standing support of medical research in Western Australia.

The company took out the "Leadership in Corporate Giving" award at Research Australia's annual "Thank You" Day Awards dinner at the National Gallery of Victoria International in Melbourne.



L to R: Professor Klinken, Wesfarmers' Managing Director Richard Goyder & WAIMR Board Chairman Dick Lester

Since 1994, the organisation has ploughed more than \$6 million into the medical research community in WA.

In March 1998, Wesfarmers supported WAIMR's establishment, becoming its founding sponsor, injecting \$5 million over five years into the Institute's research activities.

WAIMR Director Professor Peter Klinken said the many successes of WA's premier adult medical research institute would not have been possible without the philanthropic support of Wesfarmers.

"We are truly grateful that Wesfarmers had the vision to recognise the importance of assisting medical research at a time when this area was not being widely supported by the Australian business community," he said.

"The landscape has changed a great deal since then, but we are delighted that Wesfarmers has been honoured for its foresight, culture of corporate philanthropy and commitment to helping improve the health of the people who live in the communities in which it operates.

"To our knowledge, this \$5 million contribution remains one of the largest corporate donations made to medical research in Western Australia – and it has no doubt changed lives."

The Managing Director of Wesfarmers, Richard Goyder, said the company was extremely pleased and proud to have been part of bringing WAIMR into being.

CANE TOAD FUNDING BOOST

WA researchers have hailed the Carpenter Government's decision to provide extra funding for a project that could deliver a biological answer to stopping cane toads entering the State.

The Australian Cane Toad Genome Program, being run by WAIMR's Professor Grant Morahan and UWA's Professor Dale Roberts, has been awarded a further \$500,000 to help find the toads' Achilles' heel.

The WA Government had previously committed \$350,000 to the program, while the Australian Research Council (ARC) has contributed \$260,000 to the fight.

Professor Morahan said The Australian Cane Toad Genome Program would systematically define every toad gene in a bid to aid the development of a biological control strategy for the environmental menace and the latest funding would help fast-track the project.

"We believe molecular genetic technology is the best weapon we've got in trying to tackle the cane toad issue over the long term, so we're delighted the State Government has contributed this additional \$500,000," he said.

"This program is all about finding the toads' Achilles' heel by pinpointing the proteins the toad needs to survive. This knowledge will help other researchers to create a new biological control agent that can neutralize the proteins in the hope of keeping cane toads out of WA forever."

The Program involves developing a library of cane toad DNA that can aid scientists seeking to crack the genetic code of

the cane toad. Significantly, this will be Australia's first "home-grown" genome program.



Premier Alan Carpenter and Professor Morahan

WAIMR'S GRANT CELEBRATIONS

WAIMR is celebrating after sharing in nearly \$19 million dollars of funding to help unlock the causes of chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

Together with their national and international collaborators, more than a dozen scientists from WAIMR recently received confirmation of the funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Australian Research Council (ARC).

WAIMR Director Peter Klinken said he was thrilled that his team had continued its high level of success in this latest funding round.

"We have an excellent track record in obtaining grants from the NHMRC which is a key source of income for our researchers and we're delighted this year has been more successful than ever," Professor Klinken said.

The grants run for between three and five years.

WAIMR teams involving Associate Professor Luba Kalaydjieva, Dr Steven Wiltshire, Associate Professor Sibylle Schwab and Professor Dieter Wildenauer shared in more than \$2.2 million funding to undertake critical research into schizophrenia.

"In addition to searching for genes linked to schizophrenia, another grant is to investigate genes that may be involved in heroin dependence," said Professor Klinken.

"We're also very proud to announce that Associate Professor Lin Fritschi, our head of Cancer Epidemiology, secured a coveted five-year \$600,000 Fellowship.

"And we're delighted Professor Grant Morahan will share in a program grant worth more \$10 million over five years that will be ploughed into research into the prevention and cure of type 1 diabetes."



In ARC grants, WAIMR's Oliver Rackham received \$484,000 over three years to engineer cells to generate potential drug candidates.

Other WAIMR recipients of collaborative NHMRC projects are Associate Professor Karin Eidne, Dr Evan Ingley, Professor Peter Klinken, Professor Peter Leedman, Associate Professor Tom Ratajczak, Dr Brenda Powell, Professor Peter Thompson, Dr Archa Fox, Professor George Yeoh and Professor John Olynyk.

Dr Oliver Rackham



Dr Evan Ingley

BREAST CANCER RESEARCH FUNDING

WA researchers will play a part in a national project aimed at helping prevent breast cancer, as well as uncover new treatments and boosting existing treatments for patients.

The project, involving WAIMR Professor Peter Leedman, has received \$5 million funding as part of a package announced by the National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF).

NBCF CEO Sue Murray said the Foundation had approved \$10 million in funding for two new long-term research projects, involving more than 44 researchers, which aimed to change the face of breast cancer research in Australia.

The two projects, to receive \$5 million each over the next five years, involve;

- Creating a new detection technology that may be better than mammography – and may be as easy as a blood test.

Using nanotechnology and molecular genetics, this technology would have a major impact on early detection and treatment of advanced breast cancer patients.

- Studying the body's nuclear receptors to discover and fast-track information to help with prevention, new treatments and boosting existing treatments.

It is the first time in Australia that this level of funding has been committed to breast cancer research.

Visit www.nbcf.org.au for more information.

WACHA LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS

The WAIMR-based WA Centre for Health and Ageing, created to improve the health of older people by investigating common conditions of later life, has a number of exciting projects underway.

The VITA-D & PACE Studies

Dr Christopher Beer is helping to spearhead a groundbreaking project which is investigating whether giving vitamin D supplements to people with mild memory concerns can help to reduce the decline in their brain function.

WACHA is looking for volunteers over the age of 65 who are concerned about their memory to take part in the VITA-D study. Volunteers over 65 are also required for the PACE study which looks at the effect of mental exercise on memory. Inquiries: 9224 2855.



Dr Beer

Alzheimer's Study

Another WACHA project being run by UWA PhD student Pascale Bosboom is seeking to understand how some key factors in dementia might impact the quality of life of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

"This study will probe, for example, what the impact is of forgetfulness or word finding difficulty – common problems linked to Alzheimer's disease – on a person's quality of life," said Mrs Bosboom.

"The hope is that, by enhancing our understanding of the factors that influence quality of life, we may be able to improve the long-term health outcomes of people with dementia."

People diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease aged over 65 who are living in the community and healthy volunteers aged over 65 with no obvious signs of memory problems are needed to assist with the study.

Inquiries: 9224 2855.

Heart Mind Study

WACHA is also running a world-first project aimed at uncovering why most people with heart failure go on to develop memory and cognitive problems.

The aim of the Heart Mind Study is to improve quality of life for people with congestive heart failure and pin-point when and how to prevent the decline of memory, language, mood, awareness and judgment.

The Heart Mind Study is now calling for volunteers who have had a heart attack or congestive heart failure. Inquiries: 9224 2855.

STOPAT Trial

WA doctors worried some patients' lives may be at risk from unnecessary medications hope a new research trial may pave the way for easing the burden on the public health system.

The STOPAT Trial (Systematic Termination Of Pharmaceutical Agents Trial) is looking at the benefits of de-prescribing medications that patients no longer need, that aren't providing any health benefits, that may be causing harmful side effects or that may actually be reducing their quality of life.

Eligible volunteers need to be aged 50 or older and taking blood pressure, heart, fluid or pain killing medicine which they are concerned may be unnecessary. Inquiries: 9224 1338.

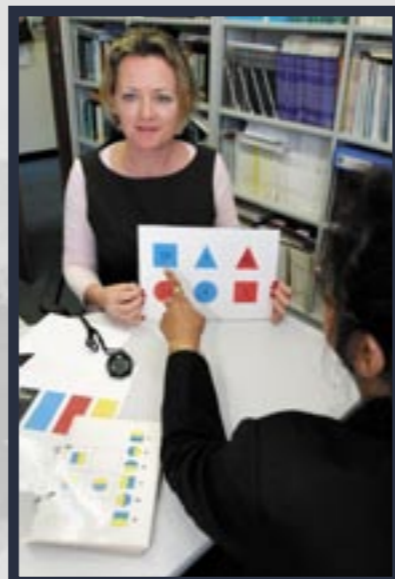
DIRECT

WACHA is also running a new trial that aims to create a direct path to help carers improve the quality of life for people with dementia in residential care facilities.

The Dementia in Residential Care Education Intervention Trial (DIRECT) will investigate the influence of education for care facility staff and GP's on improving the quality of life of people with dementia living in residential care facilities.

It's the first trial of its kind in Australian dementia education and is an NHMRC funded project.

Inquiries: 9224 8440.



PhD Student Pascale Bosboom

SPRING SEMINAR SUCCESS

In the past few months, WAIMR and its Centres have played host to a number of highly successful free public seminars.

Late in October, the Neurotrauma Research Program presented a session on the reality of living with Parkinson's disease, featuring a talk by Duncraig woman Karen Rowland who has lived with Parkinson's for seven years.

It followed a seminar held by the NRP during Brain Injury Awareness Week in September.

Johansen as well as the Department of Health's Ms Dianne Katscherion spoke on the possible dangers climate change could pose for our health including from heatstroke and mosquito-borne diseases.

'The Health Impact of Climate Change' seminar at the University Club of Western Australia was part of Research Australia's annual "Thank You" Day campaign which honours the efforts of medical researchers across the country.

Later that week, on World Diabetes Day, a group of Western Australia's prominent researchers and diabetes experts came together to discuss the battle against this growing epidemic.

The evening seminar 'Diabetes: Lifting the Weight from the World' heard from the Head of the Centre for Diabetes Research Professor Grant Morahan, WAIMR Deputy Director and endocrinologist Professor Peter Leedman, as well as Diabetes WA CEO Liz Kerrigan Benson, psychologist and diabetes educator, Angela Hislop and the Hon. Judi Moylan MP.

Please email waimr@waimr.org.au to stay informed about seminars being held by WAIMR throughout 2008.



L to R: Back - Cecil Forbes, Cheryl Johansen, Rebecca James, Dianne Katscherion, Front - Shane Maloney, Peter Klinken

'The Bid to Better Treat Brain Injuries' highlighted personal perspectives on brain injury, hearing from two survivors, Bassendean father-of-two John Tassicker and Amanda Just of Woodlands.

In early November, WAIMR Professor David Ravine presented Epigenetics: Switching on the Light to Life? as part of the Epigenetics 2007 Australian Scientific Meeting held at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre.

More than 300 people turned up to hear about the untapped potential of epigenetic research to shed light on the inner workings of both plant and animal life and impact many areas of our life.

Shortly after, WAIMR and Research Australia teamed up for a half-day symposium exploring the predicted health impacts of climate change.



NRP Executive Officer Louise Daw with John Tassicker and Amanda Just

UWA's Dr Shane Maloney and Dr Cheryl