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Media Statement

NEW LUPUS FINDING & GRANT FOR WA RESEARCHERS

Western Australian and US researchers have found a new piece of evidence suggesting a genetic linkage in the chronic autoimmune disease, lupus.

Dr Daniela Ulgiati from the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) and The University of Western Australia's School of Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences is part of a team of scientists who have had the findings published in the American journal, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Dr Ulgiati said the researchers had found a strong genetic linkage with human chromosome 1 in lupus patients, suggesting this region contained lupus susceptibility genes.

"By studying a candidate gene within this region called CR2 our findings show that several DNA sequence differences are associated with lupus susceptibility and that those with these changes have an increased risk of developing lupus," said Dr Ulgiati.

"What we're asking now and investigating is do these DNA differences result in an alteration of CR2 protein function and, consequently, does this contribute to the development of lupus."

Dr Ulgiati and colleagues have also just secured a further \$2 million from the US National Institutes of Health to expand their search for the genetic causes of lupus.

The grant runs until 2011 and will involve studying samples from lupus patients around the world, including those from WA men and women.

Dr Ulgiati said the research was aimed at understanding what prompts the body's immune system to attack healthy tissue, which is the root cause of lupus.

"This chronic and potentially fatal autoimmune disease affects more than 20,000 Australians so cracking the genetic code of lupus is viewed as an integral part in tapping into improved treatments," said Dr Ulgiati.

Lupus causes inflammation in the body that can cause pain, as well as damage the function and structure of organs including the kidney, heart, brain and lungs.

Dr Ulgiati needs people with lupus as well as healthy controls to volunteer for the Australian arm of the study.

Call (08) 9224 0333 or email daniela.ulgiati@uwa.edu.au to register your interest.

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