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Media Statement

TWO-PRONGED ATTACK PREDICTED FOR MESOTHELIOMA TREATMENT

A visiting US researcher has predicted the greatest chances of success in treating mesothelioma patients into the future will involve an ambitious two-pronged attack combining existing and new therapies.

University of Pennsylvania Professor Steve Albelda told scientists from the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research-hosted National Research Centre for Asbestos Related Diseases (NRCARD) that advances in treating the deadly cancer were much needed.

“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, who led the effort to establish the Centre, 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.

“On top of that, the urgency to fast-track this type of research is heightened by the fact that more than 20,000 people a year die from this cancer – and the number is on the rise.”

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.

Malignant mesothelioma can affect the sac lining the chest (pleura), the lining of the abdominal cavity (peritoneum) or the lining around the heart (pericardium). It can take between 10 to 30 years before asbestos exposure leads to the development of mesothelioma.

The NRCARD has been given \$6.2 million funding by the National Health & Medical Research Council through 11 research projects being undertaken nationally over three years. The University of Western Australia has injected \$900,000 into the Centre over three years.

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