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August 15th, 2008

Media Statement

**RESEARCH REVEALS HEIGHTENED MELANOMA RISK FOR SKIN CANCER SURVIVORS**

Fresh research by WA and Queensland scientists reveals melanoma survivors are at high risk of falling victim to a second potentially deadly skin cancer and that the danger stays with them for life.

The study – published in the journal *Cancer Causes & Control* – has shown that risk applies not only to people first diagnosed with invasive/aggressive melanomas, but also to those who have very early, thin melanomas.

The research was conducted by the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR), Queensland's Viertel Centre for Research in Cancer Control and the University of Queensland's School of Population Health and studied more than 50,000 cases of melanoma.\*

WAIMR's Associate Professor Lin Fritschi said the study showed that about six in every 1,000 people diagnosed with a melanoma would develop a second melanoma each year after diagnosis.

"This means that during the decade after a melanoma diagnosis, 6 in every 100 melanoma patients will have a second melanoma," said A/Prof Fritschi.

"The data also revealed that men were more likely than women to have a second melanoma, and that the older you were when you had your first melanoma, the more likely you were to have a second one.

"People with melanomas thicker than two millimetres were over 50 percent more likely to have a second melanoma than patients with thinner melanomas, but those with melanomas less than one millimeter thick were still at significant risk."

Dr Kieran McCaul from the WAIMR-based WA Centre for Health & Ageing said the research had implications for treatment.

"These results indicate that all melanoma patients require lifetime surveillance with regular skin checks and that changes are needed to current treatment guidelines," he said.

"Currently, it is thought that most patients with melanomas less than one millimetre thick only need two years of followup after their diagnosis.

"However, we have shown that the risk does not decrease over time and people who have had one melanoma treated need to remain vigilant about their skin for life."

\*Data describing 52,997 subjects with melanoma notified to The Queensland Cancer Registry between 1982 and 2003.

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