

In 2008 WAIMR celebrates 10 years since its inception and the many internationally-important discoveries which have transformed it into WA's premier adult medical research institute.



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Media Statement

PhD TO FIGHT DIABETES

A Parkwood PhD student has embarked on a project to improve the outlook for people with type 1 diabetes, by turning her attention to cell transplantation therapy.

This month, Chantel Burchill began a PhD into the production of beta cells – crucial insulin producing cells – that could eventually be used in transplantation therapy and cure people with type 1 diabetes.

Ms Burchill's PhD at the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) also hopes to pinpoint a genetic link to type 1 diabetes by looking at how genes influence the beta cell count in the pancreas.

Ms Burchill said her work, which would be carried out within WAIMR's Centre for Diabetes Research, would help to improve future transplantation approaches that could cure people with type 1 diabetes.

"My work is mainly focused on creating a renewable source of insulin producing cells to help treat people with type 1 diabetes – because these cells are attacked by the immune system in people with the condition," she said.

"If we can find a way to create a constant source of new insulin producing cells for people with type 1 diabetes, it would take us a big step closer to a cure.

"I will be looking specifically at pancreatic cells and their potential to be turned into these beta, insulin producing, cells."

Ms Burchill had been working within WAIMR's Centre for Diabetes Research for a year before embarking on her PhD.

"I was working in the laboratory alongside the head of the Centre Professor Grant Morahan for a while, then I decided I wanted to take this research further and developed my own line of investigation," she said.

"Type 1 diabetes is primarily a genetic condition and unavoidable for many people who have to spend their lifetime continuously managing their health, so I hope we can relieve that burden by developing better treatments towards a cure."

Head of the Centre, Professor Morahan will co-supervise Ms Burchill's project with Dr Fang-Xu Jiang.

"Chantel's work is a very important line of investigation and I'm pleased to see her dedicated to finding some answers on this – I know that Chantel will be thorough and I look forward to helping her progress," Professor Morahan said.

"This program is dedicated to finding a cure for diabetes by identifying cells that can be transformed into vital, insulin producing cells needed in order to develop that cure, so Chantel's work is going to give us a better understanding of how we can do that."

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MEDIA CONTACT: Sarah Hayward, WAIMR Media Consultant, m 0411 404 415, o 9388 9280