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Media Statement

**LOCAL SCIENTISTS AWARDED VITAL FUNDING FOR CANCER RESEARCH**

Local researchers have been awarded vital funding towards research which could help save leukaemia survivors from secondary cancer.

The Western Australian Institute for Medical Research's Associate Professor Lin Fritschi is leading a team of scientists who were awarded the funding as part of \$3.1 million in grants given out by the Leukaemia Foundation for studies into better treatments and cures for blood cancers.

In 2009, 9,792 Australians are projected to be diagnosed with leukaemia, lymphoma and myeloma; the equivalent of at least one every hour.\*

Associate Professor Fritschi said the grant would support a study examining the risk of developing a second cancer in patients who have been previously diagnosed with leukaemia or lymphoma.

"International studies have shown that after suffering from leukaemia or lymphoma, patients have an increased risk of developing a second cancer – in particular skin cancer has been found to be up to five times more common in these patients," she said.

"Earlier research led by WAIMR's Jen Girschik, showed that about ten per cent of patients who died from a certain type of skin cancer - known as squamous cell carcinoma - were also diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia."

A/Prof Fritschi said the research she would undertake was critical because the diagnosis of secondary cancers after leukaemia or lymphoma had not been studied extensively in Australia.

"Australia has very different patterns of cancers to other developed countries – including the highest incidence of skin cancers in the world – and so it is important to examine how high the risk of secondary cancer is here, rather than relying on international data," she said.

A/Prof Fritschi said the research – which will use linked data from the National Cancer Statistics Clearing House and the National Death Index – could lead to changes in the clinical practice of patients after leukaemia or lymphoma.

"It's hoped the research will ultimately lead to early detection and treatment of cancers in these patients, preventing unnecessary hospitalisation as well as the consequent additional costs."

The study will examine the records of all people diagnosed with a primary blood cancer between 1983 and 2003.

WAIMR Director Professor Peter Klinken, said the Leukaemia Foundation's grant was of great significance.

"For people who've already been diagnosed with leukaemia or lymphoma, it's devastating to learn that they are at high risk of being diagnosed with a secondary cancer," he said.

"It is vital we do all we can to help these people and hopefully develop better detection and treatments to tackle this problem."

\*Source - Cancer incidence projections for Australia 2002-2011 – AIHW (2005)  
[http://www.leukaemia.org.au/fileadmin/dl-docs/factsheets2/FactSheet\\_LF\\_The\\_Diseases.pdf](http://www.leukaemia.org.au/fileadmin/dl-docs/factsheets2/FactSheet_LF_The_Diseases.pdf)