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Media Statement

**WILLETTON STUDENT WINS MEDICAL RESEARCH SCHOLARSHIP**

Willetton student Kendall Thorn has been awarded a sought-after scholarship to investigate a rare but aggressive type of skin cancer at the state's premier adult medical research institute.

One of three recipients, Mr Thorn will be given the opportunity to carry out his research project into Merkel Cell Carcinoma (MCC) when he steps into a six week summer vacation program at the Western Australia Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR).

The University of Western Australia student will carry out his own investigation into the rates and trends of MCC under the guidance of WAIMR's Associate Professor Lin Fritschi

"The ultimate aim of my investigations is to uncover more information about this rare, but quick to develop skin cancer which could give us clues to improve diagnosis and survival rates," Mr Thorn said.

"My project will review existing data from all the cases of MCC in WA residents since 1996, looking closely at the incidence and survival rates of patients with MCC in order to highlight any common characteristics that may give us extra information about how to best treat this cancer."

Soon to enter his final year of a Bachelor of Health Science, Mr Thorn said the scholarship was practical stepping stone to further his career in medical research.

"This WAIMR scholarship is an opportunity to gain experience implementing research projects and learn from leading scientists, which is vital for a career in the medical research industry," he said.

"I'm thrilled to have been given this opportunity and look forward to working with the prominent team at WAIMR."

From January to February, Mr Thorn will work at WAIMR's Laboratory for Cancer Epidemiology, based at their Nedlands campus.

WAIMR Director Professor Peter Klinken said this was the fourth year WAIMR had offered vacation scholarships and was thrilled to welcome Kendall, along with two more scholarship students, to the WAIMR team.

"Our aim is to help these young scientists expand their practical experience, fast-track their careers, and give them the best start to their chosen paths here in WA," Professor Klinken said.

"The program has not only proved successful for the students, it's also been embraced by our senior scientists who value the innovative ideas and fresh approaches the next generation of medical researchers bring to the table."

Other projects being undertaken by students within the vacation scholarships program include investigating gene defects associated with a muscular disorder known as distal myopathy, as well as analysing the genetics of epilepsy.

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