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Media Statement

**NEW BID TO UNLOCK GENETICS OF MELANOMA PREVENTION**

Today, a new West Australian project will be given funding to hunt for genes that may protect the body against melanoma in a bid to unlock natural prevention and treatment for the aggressive cancer.

The investigation is one of two projects to be awarded the first Scott Kirkbride Melanoma Research Centre (SKMRC) Discovery Research Priming Grants, designed to support world-first research that will unveil genetic clues towards treating melanoma.

Scientists from the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR), Professor Grant Morahan and Dr Louise Winteringham will receive \$100,000 and \$50,000 respectively for their year-long projects.

Professor Morahan said he was grateful for the funding to investigate a difficult area of research.

“We will be looking to find genes that may naturally protect against melanoma – finding these would help researchers better understand the causes of melanoma, how it develops and evades the immune system, as well as provide opportunities to find new ways to treat this disease,” he said.

“If we can find a way to unlock the genetic clues to help the body strengthen its own prevention against melanoma, we would have a huge advantage over the condition and be in a position to save thousands of young lives.

“Australia has the world’s highest rate of melanoma, which each year kills over 1200 people, and while we know UV exposure is a major risk factor, genetic background is also important.”

Professor Morahan said the project would utilize a world-leading resource, ‘The Gene Mine’ which he was developing in WA, and success of this project could pave the way for identifying genes that may help protect against other cancers, diabetes, neurological diseases, and cardiovascular diseases.

Thanks to the \$50,000 discovery grant, Dr Winteringham will now lead a team investigating the tumor suppressor gene Hls5 and its potential influence in melanoma.

“We have already uncovered a role for Hls5 in leukemia and breast cancer, and during that process we noticed that the gene also interacts with a number of key proteins involved in one of the known growth pathways associated with melanoma,” she said.

“So far, we’ve found that Hls5 influences the levels of proteins affecting the growth of certain cancer cells, so we will now work to find out whether this is the case for melanoma.

“Ultimately, we hope to be able to pinpoint a target for correcting the defect that contributes to melanoma cell growth.”

The Hls5 tumour suppressor gene was reported by WAIMR Director Professor Peter Klinken in 2004.

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SKMRC Medical Director Professor Peter Leedman said he looked forward to following the progress of the projects, which would be a valuable addition to the Centre.

“The discovery grants are designed to support world-first research projects that will help to unveil clues towards treating melanoma, which takes so many young Australian lives, and these first recipients have set the bar very high,” he said.

“It’s a privilege for the SKMRC to be able to help further important research like this, which has all been made possible by generous donation and support from the public and business community in WA.”

Professor Morahan and Dr Winteringham will be presented with the SKMRC Discovery Research Priming Grants at the charity’s annual fundraising luncheon today at Subiaco Oval.

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